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BEYOND DISILLUSION

BY · WM · NORMAN
GUTHRIE

A · DRAMATIC · STUDY
OF · MODERN
MARRIAGE

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Beyond Disillusion

A DRAMATIC STUDY
OF MODERN MARRIAGE

BY

William Norman Guthrie



The Petrus Stuyvesandt Book Guild
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Manhattan

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FOREWORD

NO QUESTION is more interesting to us in America than that of the perpetuation of the family. With the constant insistence upon the rights of the individual, not only to life, but to happiness, we find ourselves forgetting the value of hardship and discipline to the individual himself. We are disposed to regard all higher engagements and contracts in the light of their immediate reaction, gauged in terms of pleasure. There is with us still operative a goodly amount of the old utilitarian philosophy, which mingles most singularly with a popularized Darwinism.

No wonder then our ideals of marriage are somewhat vague. And yet withal we are a conservative people, loyal and very sentimental. We are not prepared to jeopardize the old home virtues, at least not to confess that we do. So our conscience is divided and our mind confused, in all that concerns the hearth and the cradle.

Most of the discussion of marriage which has taken dramatic form has seemed to be, on the whole, negative and destructive, not only because it is far easier to criticise than to create, but because the art form of drama itself makes any positive presentment of human interests, which cannot come to adequate expression in sudden acts or explosions of passion, extraordinarily difficult, not to say impossible. Even an Ibsen, past master of the craft, and a genius to boot, can carry his argument successfully to the slamming of the door and the exit of the lady and the bewildered reaction of the husband, as in the *Doll's House*, but he is not able to make himself anything like so well understood when he struggles with the subtler problem of the master builder's soul, or even John Gabriel Borkmann's; and much less yet can he make his point when, as in *When We Dead Awaken*, he suggests through unconventional and futile rebellion a reconsideration of the requisites for an honorable and psychologically and sociologically valuable marriage. In other words, the dramatist finds it necessary to cast his prophecy of a better order in the form of a retrospective criticism of pathetic might-have-beens; and the public is only too apt to rise from the performance or the reading of even so clearly reasoned a drama

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as any of Henrik Ibsen's masterpieces, with the happy or unhappy sense that an excellent argument has been presented for the negative.

The present play endeavors to make such a misunderstanding of its purpose impossible. The writer has resorted to what may seem an improbable solution of his problem, thinking it far less serious to be taxed with improbability in plot, considering how very extraordinary are the happenings of life, than to have the ideal purpose of his work miscarry. Not only are all possible solutions of any problem probable, but, with a little observation of life unbiased by past artistic conventions, they are far more frequently actual than anyone could imagine. Many and many a separation and divorce has been silently settled in experience; not always, to be sure, so happily as in the plot of the present play, but the writer does not anticipate or desire to forecast an average probability. He would fain make clear to his reader and perhaps his spectator (if the play is fortunate enough, against all likelihood, to find presentation) what is to him the poetic and religious presupposition of an enduring partnership.

It is strange that our ritual offices, which undertake to solemnize and sanctify marriage, never inquire into the state of mind of the individuals concerned; only induce them to make certain promises, which they cannot possibly realize are wholly beyond human power to fulfil, without a suggestion of the difficulties they have naturally enough never considered. Perhaps a marriage office that should ask of the bridegroom and the bride respectively whether they were prepared, nay, passionately eager, to be crucified on the cross which the other should represent, because of a holy devotion to the ideal of fellowship and loyalty, and the devout hope of offspring better than themselves, and of a nobler civilization to supersede that of their generation—perhaps such a marriage office would be regarded as imprudently deterrant, pessimistic, not to say, humorous! And yet anyone who knows life and loves life must clearly realize that all true joys are purchased at the cost of great pains, and sometimes our highest triumphs imply our deepest preparatory humiliations. No noble doctrine of marriage or of any other human relation can be set up and maintained in actual life

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without severe strain, without individual and social sacrifice; and the only question for us to decide is: whether the particular doctrine deserves the strain and the sacrifice, and whether we can at all get along without the doctrine, and have life still seem to us tolerable in our moments of spiritual elevation above the pettily personal and transient.

Briefly put then, this play is an effort to present vitally, through the actions and reactions of human beings, under significant conditions, what seems to the writer a constructive suggestion, a valid consecration, a worthy conception of sacrifice. Just because the individual is sacred the individual must cheerfully endure whatever hardship is requisite to keep him true to his highest ideal of human relationship.

It would be incorrect to say that this play was conceived and written with the view to pressing home a particular doctrine. Rather, it was an effort at a synthetic vision of the human struggle which had been, with keen, sometimes aching sympathy, observed as presented fragmentarily in a number of cruel cases which fascinated the author. The judgments reached upon attaining to this synthetic vision were not clearly foreseen when the material was first decided upon and the preliminary efforts at its subdual for artistic uses undertaken.

A preface is always a precarious undertaking. It tells too much or too little. It is apt to confuse the artistic issue with personal considerations. The writer, in this case, has no apology to make. He but desires to share his creative joys and pains with the like-minded, whoever they may be, and to present to those who differ from him his own best effort at dramatic thinking—thinking that is not abstract, but human; a thinking that proceeds not from syllogism to syllogism, but through actual human souls and destinies—the only sort of thinking that in the long run can help to solve any question as human as this one, which baffles alike the advocate of authority and the unmystical rationalist in our age.

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REGISTER OF PERSONS

ACT I.

RICHARD WALTER (35).....		Architect
LAURA (32).....		His Wife
DICK (13)	}	Their Children
FREDERIKA (11)		
EVELYN (9)		
CEDRIC (5)		
MOTHER WALTER.....		His Mother
ARTHUR MCARTHUR.....		Walter's Assistant
EDITH DWIGHT.....		Walter's Secretary and Laura's School Friend
BENEDICT GREGG.....		Conventional Parish Clergyman
MARION.....		His Wife, Unreconciled to his calling (Laura's Stepsister)
MRS. METTINGHAM AND FIVE CHILDREN.....		Dependents of Laura

ACT II.

HELEN DARNEILL.....	Proposed Client of Walter
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ACT III.

MR. LIGHTFOOT.....	Master of Art-Dancing
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ACT IV.

THOMAS BLAKE..	Far-Western Financier, hopelessly in love with Helen
WILLIAM FOSTER PATTERSON.....	Precious Poet and Press Agent

ACT I

THE HAPPY FAMILY

ACT I

Stage directions: Laura seated in a rocking chair by hearth to right; Frederika with back to hearth, working at puzzle picture at library table—pushes Japanese prints from time to time; Walter is seen rummaging in the half-story, sometimes in sight of the audience, at the head of the winding stair, then goes back out of sight for another print during what follows; Frederika, watching for her father's being out of sight, tiptoes with goldfishes across room to left rear and places them near window sill on organ.

SCENE 1

LAURA—Now, Cedric, I do want you to learn this lullaby for Father.

CEDRIC (*In Mother's lap*)—What's a lullaby, Mother?

LAURA—It's a little song you sing to a child; to give it happy dreams.

CEDRIC—I'm no child; you needn't sing a lullaby to me.

LAURA—Foolish boy, it's for Father I want you to learn it. He's going on a long journey across the sea, and I am sure, when he's far away among strangers, he will like to remember how his little son sang it to him on his last night at home.

FREDERIKA (*Looking over her shoulder sneeringly*)—Will the lullaby bless Father with happy dreams when he is sea-sick?

LAURA (*Paying no attention*)—Follow me word for word:

Who dove or violet
Hath seen, shall fear no threat;
Nor mother for Eden pine
With thee, sweet baby mine.

FREDERIKA—I guess she won't have leisure to pine for Eden with him. Shoot these prints, they do so get in one's way. (*Walter starts down the winding stair, stops to smile sarcastically on the scene.*)

LAURA—Frederika, I've told you again and again not to meddle with your father's paraphernalia.

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FREDERIKA—You may be sure I wouldn't if they'd just quit stubbing my toes.

LAURA—What have you done with your father's goldfish?

FREDERIKA—Hush, Mother; on the organ.

LAURA—You know they mean a great deal to him.

FREDERIKA—They mean silence and peace, don't they?

LAURA—Say this after me, line by line, Cedric. Isn't this a lovely song, full of peace and quiet?

In vain would the wind disclose
A bud of the shy wild rose,
Though the smile of the morning sky
Wide open her golden eye.

FREDERIKA—You can't understand that, can you, Cedric?

CEDRIC—Of course I can. I always understand everything. It's a golden eye winking at a rose; there now, big tease.

FREDERIKA (*Laughs boisterously*)—That's all you get out of it, is it?

LAURA (*Trying to keep her temper*)—Please don't you interfere with Cedric when he's good. Let's try, now, the third stanza.

FREDERIKA—Stanza? That rhymes with bonanza, Sancho Panza,

A handsome man's a
Rare bonanza,
Witness Apollo and Sancho Panza;
That's the way to cram a stanza.

LAURA (*Severely*)—Frederika! (*Frederika chuckles at her own smartness*) Don't pay any attention to her, Cedric.

In vain the earthquake's rage
And wars the blind seas wage,
For pearl-shell and daisy—still
Laugh at their cruel will.

CEDRIC (*Drawling loud*)—Ti li—like tha—at.

FREDERIKA—Of course you do. Earthquakes and seas at sixes and sevens, and daisies jigging with a mother-of-pearl! (*Enter Evelyn with an armful of dolls, walking on tiptoe, humming to*

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herself) Hello there! Did you rob a church fair? Give me one, won't you, greedy?

EVELYN—You are too old to play with dolls, Miss Smarty.

FREDERIKA—Do you think I'd have them? Dear me, no! I want them for Mother's pets, the Botheringhams.

EVELYN—They are too good for dirty little brats. My grandmother took a heart-stimulant to finish them, and nervous botheration whipping lace on their lingerie. (*Exhibiting their underclothes*) Don't you wish they were yours?

FREDERIKA—No, thank ybu; I prefer my own.

EVELYN—Sour grapes!

LAURA—For heaven's sake, do keep still, children.

EVELYN—I really didn't know you wanted to talk yourself, Mother. (*While her mother sing-songs the following stanza, Evelyn slyly lays down the dolls on the window seat, then, casting a significant look at Cedric, moves them into the window sill by the organ out of his reach and tiptoes to his blocks on the floor and begins building behind her mother's chair. Cedric restlessly looks to one side and the other of his mother's chair, and Evelyn dodges so he doesn't see her.*)

LAURA—Say it after me, child, won't you?

In the drop of the trembling dew

CEDRIC—I told you I'm not a child!

FREDERIKA—No, he's a little "twinkle-twinkle," that's what he is, the dear!

EVELYN (*Mimicking his drawl*)—A te—ar and a sta—ar in one.

CEDRIC—I'll come and pummel you both if you don't stop.

LAURA—Shame on you, girls. Come, come, my little man, say it after me!

In the drop of the trembling dew
Doth the sun his glory view;
And in thee, sweet baby mine,
Are life and love divine.

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WALTER (*Passing behind her*)—Divine! Ah, yes. Totally divine!
(*Collects a few prints on the table and goes out through the conservatory.*)

LAURA (*Without turning*)—Who was that?

FREDERIKA—Just Father. Didn't enjoy the racket, I imagine.

CEDRIC—Leave my blocks alone or I'll smash your dolls!

LAURA—Please, dear, don't get into one of those furious tantrums.

CEDRIC—I say she sha'n't have my blocks!

LAURA—If you behave like a generous little gentleman to your sister, you may have some candy.

CEDRIC—I don't have to behave to get candy. (*Shaking his fist at Evelyn while he talks to his mother.*)

FREDERIKA (*Stepping up and looking over Evelyn's shoulder*)—
What's this crazy thing you are building, anyway? Father would say that it had "no style"! Mongrel! Cross between a Chinese pagoda and a sky-scraper, unpractical besides. If an earthquake came along—see, I'll play earthquake. (*Throws down the construction with great clatter.*)

CEDRIC—(*Clapping his hands with glee*)—Goody, goody, do it again!

EVELYN—I'll go straight to my grandma. She treats me right. You are all big bullies and hoodlums and nasty, greedy goops, and——

FREDERIKA (*Breaks in*)—Parallelograms! Eh? Miss Fussy-wussy can't appreciate a lesson in practical architecture?

LAURA—Hush! Evelyn, you will drive us out of our wits. Why will you vex your sister, Frederika?

EVELYN—I won't hush. I am going to yell and shriek all I want.

FREDERIKA—Just a little object lesson in equilibration. What she needs, Mother, is discipline.

LAURA—What of yourself?

FREDERIKA—It is too late for mine, I'm afraid; I've missed that experience for good and all. (*Enter servant with two expressmen.*)

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SERVANT—Where are the trunks of Mr. Walter?

LAURA—In his room.

SERVANT—Which room?

LAURA—His room.

(Cedric gets a chair to get Evelyn's dolls on the window sill; Walter comes out of the Conservatory.)

LAURA—Can't you come again later in the day?

SERVANT—They have to take the baggage now for the night train.

LAURA—But Mr. Walter may yet change his mind.

SERVANT—They can be brought back from the station if he does.

LAURA—Oh, very well. The idea of his going to Europe and leaving us here all alone!

WALTER—Cedric, don't touch Evelyn's dolls.

SCENE 2

(This entire scene may be omitted in representation.)

(Enter Mrs. Mettingham from house, escorted by Dick with burlesque politeness, followed by the children, puny and more or less disreputable, the file ending with the pitiable figure of a man embarrassed, hat in hand.)

DICK—Mrs. Mettingham desires to pay you a little welcome visit.

WALTER *(Aside)*—The whole zoo let loose!

MRS. METTINGHAM—Oh, my dear Mrs. Walter, you're back from the country; I'm so glad. We had a hard time getting along without you.

LAURA—Ah, but you know, you must learn to depend on yourself.

MRS. METTINGHAM—True, the Lord has abundantly blessed us, but bless me, you are the best of His blessings; that you are, yourself. *(Embraces her. Laura tries hard to disengage herself without being obviously unkind. Walter exit in evident disgust.)*

LAURA *(With surprise)*—But I haven't been away!

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MRS. METTINGHAM—Strange! I would have been here a long time ago, but Mr. Dick kept telling me how you were ordered away from home for a little rest, by the doctor. (*Dick winks at his mother.*)

DICK—Mother kept putting off, you know.

LAURA (*Taking the hint, and turning the subject*)—Benny is growing up!

MRS. METTINGHAM—Where's your manners, boy?

LAURA—Only a wee bit shy (*Taps him on the head*); and Susie's so tall!

MRS. METTINGHAM—Children do shoot up so, like, like——

DICK—I should say—asparagus in a moonlight night.

LAURA—What's wrong with Jenny? She's so pale.

FREDERIKA (*Aside to Dick*)—Had her face washed for once, I guess.

MRS. METTINGHAM—Jenny's the sickly one; eats like a horse all the same, and doesn't get any good out of it. It's a hard job to put food down all these gullets, when the cost of living keeps going up every hour.

LAURA—Frederika, do entertain the children.

DICK—That's it, copy Aunt Edith; run a kindergarten. Come, kinder, come into my garden, "says the spider to the fly." (*Pointing to Frederika with a grimace*) She'll play ogre. "And when she's eaten all of you, you'll politely ask her why."

MRS. METTINGHAM (*In admiration*)—Your children are so clever. (*Shoving several of them toward Dick*) Go along with Mr. Dick.

DICK—Needn't be scared of Frederika. She's not a tithe as ugly as she looks. Kindly ogre, awfully good-natured after a big meal. (*Children off to right rear.*) (*Dick strips the Christmas tree, and Frederika distributes the ornaments among them.*)

LAURA—Surely your eldest son, Mrs. Mettingham——

MRS. METTINGHAM (*Breaking in*)—Yes, Jamie, you mean; he's a good son to us—a very good son.

LAURA—And does nothing for your support?

MRS. METTINGHAM—Oh, my, you haven't heard the news. Jamie, James I mean, is just going to be married to a rich shoe-dealer's daughter, and has a job already in the business. It all comes from the good looks he inherited from his father. Then Jamie was always smart and made what education he picked up go a long way. While a-courting, he had to put up a fine appearance, so he couldn't be expected to help us with money.

LAURA—But the courting is nearly over, and then he can contribute.

MRS. METTINGHAM (*Horried*)—O dear me, no! I'm too proud to have her ashamed of us. I told him to say he was an orphan (the Lord will forgive me). Being a real lady she must never guess how down in their luck his folks are, though I must say we are respectable—always have been.

LAURA (*Cheerfully, to Mr. Mettingham*)—And Mr. Mettingham, how are you getting along with the job Mr. Gregg procured for you at the warehouse?

MRS. METTINGHAM (*Quickly interrupting him*)—Bill, you go down to the yard and help bring in that stove wood for the cook from the shed and we'll be along directly. (*Bill Mettingham exits sheepishly but evidently much relieved. She sighs deeply*) You see it's no use at all; he never was no hand, poor man, at manual labor. He had only kept that job three days when he came down with inflammatory rheumatism. You see in the old country—son of a sexton and his father the same before him—he put in his spare time on fine joinery, real artistic cabinet-work, all inlaid woods, you know; and he just can't stand exposure in all sorts of weather, and the heavy lifting kills him, gives him the asthma. In the old country——

LAURA (*Breaking in with some indignation*)—But surely he must adapt himself to circumstances, and find some way to help you with the children.

MRS. METTINGHAM (*Rallying loyally to her husband's defence*)—When they were babies, he kept them from falling into the fire while I was out scrubbing, so you might almost say they owe

him their lives. And then (*mysteriously*) he carries that policy —\$500.00.

LAURA (*Laughing*)—And you have to scrape the money together for the premiums?

MRS. METTINGHAM—Why, he can't, you know.

LAURA—And you think you'll ever enjoy that \$500.00?

MRS. METTINGHAM—With the Lord's help! Although sickly and rheumatic folks that have the asthma——(*shaking her head dubiously and sighing*). (*During what precedes, Dick has got a hatchet, chops off the branches of the Christmas tree, and the children burn them one at a time in the hearth; Frederika wields the hearth broom after the sparks, Cedric clapping and stamping applause; the Mettingham children stolidly staring; confused cries.*)

DICK—One branch at a time, Cedric.

FREDERIKA—This isn't a bonfire; you'll set the house on fire.

CEDRIC—Oh! what a spark.

FREDERIKA—Smash it quick!

CEDRIC—What fun if the house should burn!

DICK—You little rascal, stamp it out quick.

FREDERIKA—Look there, Jenny, your dress will catch, and you'll burn up to a cinder.

DICK—If you catch, you'll explode.

FREDERIKA—She's no cannon cracker.

LAURA—Oh, children, what a clatter.

DICK—We're entertaining Mrs. Mettingham's progeny with becoming hospitality.

MRS. METTINGHAM—Oh, don't you mind the children; I was just going to tell you, dear Mrs. Walter, since you're our guardian angel, that I've had to part with all our stuff to pay on Bill's policy. (*Wiping her eyes with her apron.*) Yes, and the grand furniture and all those blankets and comforters——

LAURA (*Who had sunk wearily into a big chair*)—Really, Mrs. Met-

tingham, it would have been much cheaper for me to have met the premium myself out of my charity fund.

MRS. METTINGHAM (*Brightening visibly*)—Exactly what I told Mr. Mettingham, but he insisted that so long as we had anything ourselves, coming to you'd be begging; and he couldn't stand for drawing on your charity fund anyhow. And Mr. Dick, as I told you, kept saying you were bound for the country, so we just did what we could and disposed of everything—stove, sewing-machine, the automatic and those beautiful bathtubs, porcelain lined; parting with them did hurt me to the quick. And the green iron bedsteads, on little brown castors, with shining brass knobs, oh, my!

LAURA (*Jumping up in impatience and looking as if she had forgotten everything Mrs. Mettingham had said*)—I wonder where Richard is? (*Turning to Mrs. Mettingham*) That was all exceedingly foolish, Mrs. Mettingham, but I suppose there is nothing else for me to do now except buy you a new outfit. See that this never occurs again!

MRS. METTINGHAM (*Embracing Laura, to her visible irritation*)—Oh, you are our blessed guardian angel.

LAURA (*Having freed herself, pushes her gently toward the door*)—I can't hear any more to-day.

MRS. METTINGHAM (*Concealing her irritation*)—Of course you can't. Come, all you chickens, and thank our guardian angel.

DICK (*As if calling roll*)—Tom, Ellen, Jenny, Ben, Susie, all of you, Mother wants her asparagus to skip.

LAURA—Come back to-morrow, and I'll give you the check. (*Walter enters just in time to see Mrs. Mettingham's second embrace.*)

DICK (*Winking at his father*)—Not twice only; it's a ritual that has to be gone through regularly.

(*Mrs. Mettingham at the door turns around for a third embrace. Walter exit, intolerably bored and disgusted. Dick drives out the Mettingham children, playing they are cattle. Cedric takes his mother's feather duster, which she has instinc-*

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tively picked up in the hubbub, and begins dusting the outside of the window sashes, and then tries to catch a sparrow; reaches over, loses his balance and Frederika catches him just in time. Laura rushes over, hugs the child, sits down on the floor, rocking him hysterically.)

MRS. METTINGHAM—Heaven be praised, nothing happened to the little cherubim. God helps them as helps His poor; the respectable, I mean. (*Exit discreetly. Frederika calmly returns to her puzzle.*)

DICK—The last of the Mettinghams has gone. (*Opens the window by the organ*) Hygienic ventilation encouraged by the visits of the poor to the well-to-do!

FREDERIKA—Oh, shut it—too cold for me to work out my puzzle-picture, and Evelyn's dolls will follow Cedric's example and try to commit suicide.

DICK—Suicide!

LAURA—The poor dear boy nearly fell to his death.

CEDRIC—I was trying to catch a snow bird. Won't you catch it for me, Dick?

DICK—Not your way, thank you.

SCENE 3

(Enter Walter unnoticed.)

DICK (*To his mother. Helps her to a chair and picks up Cedric and shakes him playfully*)—Do be comfortable. And you little orang-u-tan, what do you mean—scaring everybody out of his wits?

CEDRIC—I'm no 'rang-tang, nohow, and I never scared you. So there now.

WALTER (*To Laura ironically, passing the family in review*)—Where's Evelyn? The only member missing at the family rendezvous.

FREDERIKA—Gone to her grandmother's.

WALTER (*To Laura*)—What went wrong?

LAURA—She was playing with Cedric's blocks; he objected; Frederika knocked over what she had built.

FREDERIKA—It wasn't practical and I just played earthquake for demonstration. It's so hard to convince her with arguments.

WALTER (*To Laura*)—And you couldn't control them?

LAURA—I was too tired. They're all so spirited and original. I was trying to teach Cedric a lullaby. Now I suppose he's forgotten all I taught him.

WALTER—It isn't a lullaby we need so much as discipline, order, someone in authority over this hubbub and hullabaloo. (*Turning to Frederika*) Frederika, you should be ashamed of yourself playing earthquake—a didactic intention is no excuse. Go, find Evelyn and say I want her to return immediately; and, since you have been unkind to her, apologize and make up. Dick, oblige me by going along to keep the peace.

DICK—Policeman to the suffragettes? Lovely job!

CEDRIC—I want to go too—always get candy at Grandma's and never have to behave at all. (*Exeunt children.*)

WALTER (*Looking dejectedly about the room, going over to the organ*)—Goldfish moved—window thrown wide! Fresh air—no matter what it kills! (*Going over to table*) Prints shoved aside for a puzzle!

LAURA—One can't scold children from morning to night.

WALTER—But they can be excluded—can't they—from one room?

LAURA—You would drive them out of their home? Put them in strait-jackets and gag them?

WALTER—I tried a studio and office in the city. You accused me of deserting you.

LAURA—I hoped you might share my responsibilities.

WALTER—Exactly, so I moved home—bag and baggage; built the office in the back yard—the studio, and this music-room. And then—Attila and the Huns! Worse yet, the barbarians effected final settlement.

LAURA—Call your innocent children barbarians? If that's what they are—is it wholly my fault?

WALTER—I repeat it—this is my study for rest and spiritual renewal. You alone were to have free access to it. Here I was to court the fickle visions—the soul of a man's soul. It should be respected by the family.

LAURA—If they are to be kept aloof from the head, why have a family at all?

WALTER—God knows!

LAURA—You can't mean what you say. (*About to cry.*)

WALTER (*Kindly*)—Not if it seems unkind, of course; yet you must see that I can't be the keeper of a zoo, or an insane asylum, and be any sort of an artist. You ought to know, by this, the agony of concentrated attention. I'm not a youth of twenty. The dynamic idea, the creative mood don't come of themselves any more.

LAURA—What you say may all be perfectly true, but your living children are more precious than the buildings you erect for strangers!

WALTER—Precious things should be put in a strong box at the bank! and what's more, that precious brother-in-law, the Parson, has inveigled you into the toils of philanthropy. At it from dawn till midnight, week in, week out. All kinds of detestable nuisances in the name of public spirit and Christian service; and between whiles we're regaled with circus-parades of Mettinghams and other such flotsam and jetsam—single file, germs and all. And the old hag at the head of the procession has to hug you. It's enough to make a man laugh himself to death, or beat Job cursing the day of his birth! And yet, you wonder that I start for Europe?

LAURA—Why, Richard, I've tried to show sympathy for your art.

WALTER (*Interrupting her*)—Sketching, for instance, in would-be Japanese fashion—the winsome aspects of the slum?

LAURA (*Hurt at the mockery*)—If I had not tried so hard to play the part of both, and save you from the cares of the house, from

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social duties, church and civic interests, I might have had more leisure to devote to you.

WALTER—So it's all to help my art?

LAURA—And I dispensed with governesses and nursery-maids; labored to keep your growing family close about you; to save you trouble in future, making them our comrades.

WALTER—Cronies, yes! (*Shrugs his shoulders; orders Japanese prints silently; moves goldfish back to table from organ; sweeps Frederika's puzzle into the box; speaking as if to himself*) Oh for common-sense and poise!

LAURA (*Following Walter with her eyes*)—Why can't you manage not to notice what jars on you—like those goldfish of yours.

WALTER—They have nothing to do but ogle and goggle and gobble and swim around and around. If you were to drop a lot of polly-wogs and two or three electric eels into the same crystal bowl with them, it might upset their poise.

LAURA—They'd adapt themselves or die.

WALTER—I'll survive, never fear. I'm after conditions of work on which depends everything—even for the children. And the worst of it is, my poor, dear girl, you don't seem to understand.

LAURA—One thing I understand—your family are to be seen, not heard; and seen only when they happen to fit into the picturesque panorama your fancy conjures up for you at the moment.

SCENE 4

DICK (*Enters, giving his father a military salute, holding Evelyn by the arm*)—Secured the prisoner, sir! Didn't retreat to "her Grandma's." Captured in the woodshed, howling; the tears freezing to heavy icicles on her eyelashes!

WALTER—You did what I bade you, Frederika?

FREDERIKA—I offered her a profuse and ingenious apology.

DICK—The vaccination didn't take.

EVELYN (*Between sobs*)—She's just been punching me all the way through the yard and up the stairs.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

FREDERIKA—To make her accept my apology! I couldn't think on the spot of any other method.

DICK—You observe, sir, Frederika is not particularly gifted in diplomacy; and the prisoner is a trifle captious and unreasonable.

WALTER (*At his wit's end*)—Laura, I give it up. I don't make a very capable police-judge when I do try.

LAURA—Always a man's way, to expect a woman to do what he himself can't.

WALTER (*Semi-sarcastically*)—For what else is she so superior a being? (*Exit.*)

EVELYN—Let me go. (*Goes over to her dolls, wipes the tears on her dress and begins to play with the dolls on the organ manual, still sobbing audibly.*)

FREDERIKA—Where's my puzzle?

LAURA—Your father moved it off his table; serves you right for meddling with his prints. Come, Cedric (*seating herself by the fire*), let us see if you remember a word of that lullaby.

CEDRIC—Want to make a round house with my blocks.

LAURA—Come! Come!

CEDRIC—I won't learn a lullaby 'cept it's about a railroad engine.

FREDERIKA—Indulging in a head-on collision with a fast freight, or jumping the tracks off a high trestle, eh?

DICK—The nature of the beast. Cedric's a boy.

LAURA—Well, it's of no use. (*Goes dejectedly to the fire and begins to dust everything in and out of reach.*)

SCENE 5

EDITH (*Enters unobserved from the conservatory—takes in the scene critically*)—You look tired and worried.

LAURA (*Provoked*)—Who wouldn't be?

EDITH (*Orders the room a little*)—Where's Mr. Walter?

LAURA—I don't know; he just went out. In the studio perhaps.

EDITH—No, I came from there. Won't you find him for us?

BEYOND DISILLUSION

LAURA—I can't attend to his family and him too.

EDITH—But why is the family here? Isn't this his retreat?

LAURA (*Bored*)—Just what Richard says; but why have a family if a man wants to retreat from them!

EDITH—He is a special sort of man—an artist, my dear Laura.

LAURA—Such special sorts should remain celibates! (*Rising wearily*) I suppose I'll have to look him up and send him to the studio when I find him.

EDITH—Not to the studio; he can't work there; he can't concentrate.

LAURA—Arthur and you get on his nerves there, as we do here?

EDITH—His conscience troubles him there. There's so much to do he doesn't know where to begin. Come, cheer up and help us. Maybe we will prove to him he doesn't have to go to Europe after all for inspiration.

LAURA (*With some interest*)—How are you going about that?

EDITH—Why, show him he can work here. Arthur will bring him a difficult problem; his hand has not lost its cunning, and he will solve it on the spot, and so we'll show him the spell is broken.

LAURA—Thank you; you are a faithful friend. (*Starts to go. Edith stops her.*)

EDITH—Now, little people, from the weest to the biggest!

CEDRIC AND EVELYN—Well, Auntie Edith?

EDITH—Clear the coast, bag and baggage; dolls, puzzles, blocks—This is your father's sanctum sanctorum.

CEDRIC—But we like it here; the music-room has just got to be ours!

EDITH—Not at all, my little man. And what's more, you'll all vacate in a jiffy, and then (*mysteriously*) we'll, each one of us, see if there's anything we don't know, and this evening before bedtime organize a "find-out club."

EVELYN—What's that, Auntie?

BEYOND DISILLUSION

EDITH—Each tries to answer the other's questions.

FREDERIKA—Just a game of truth or "snake bites"?

EDITH—Except that you try to get the truth about things, instead of horrid lies about people.

DICK—Detective competition, eh?

EDITH—Exactly. First prize to the one who asks the hardest questions, second prize to the one who answers the greatest number correctly.

EVELYN—I'll ask——

EDITH—Keep your questions, little maid, from everybody till we play the game.

DICK—Not half bad, Auntie Edith, as an idea, but are you sure it'll work?

FREDERIKA—Work, you dunce? If you'll play *Œdipus*, I'll be Sphinx and make up the conundrums.

EDITH—Shoo out all of you! goslings, geese, and gander. (*Moves slowly toward the door.*)

EVELYN—You're almost as nice as Grandma!

EDITH—No comparison. I wonder which prize Cedric is going to get.

CEDRIC—The biggest.

EVELYN—As usual.

EDITH—We'll see; everybody get ready for the find-out club. (*Exeunt children.*)

LAURA—How beautifully you do manage them.

EDITH (*Shrugs shoulders*)—Training.

LAURA—What did you stop me for?

EDITH—Just to beg you—do help us hold Mr. Walter. I have a vague feeling, if he goes away, he won't return.

LAURA—If he wants to go, let him.

EDITH—You don't mean that. Let's hold him for the business, the children, if not for yourself.

LAURA (*Hesitating*)—I'd try, but I don't know how.

ACT II

THE EVICTION OF THE ARTIST

ACT II

SCENE 1

(Edith stirs the fire after setting everything to rights. She seems a practical, not an æsthetic person. Her movements are jerky, angular. Her pinc nez gives her a supercilious air—which she doesn't deserve. Enter McArthur with drawing board—which he sets up several times—looking at it critically.)

MCARTHUR *(In front of board)*—The light's failing early.

EDITH *(Peering out of the window)*—The snow flurry makes the whole sky gray. *(McArthur pulls the screen over—shutting off the fireside—from the rear of the room)* What are you about?

MCARTHUR—Making the fire cosier. Extraordinary order in the romping room.

EDITH—Your humble servant's contribution to the harmony of the spheres.

MCARTHUR—Mr. Walter doesn't often hear it except punctuated with discords every few bars.

EDITH—Music's to charm the senses! The poor, benighted man doesn't thrill to Straussian cacophony!

MCARTHUR—So she's training him to advanced artistic ideals—by chaos? *(Pause)* Why does she drive him away?

EDITH—It is not she; it is his erratic genius. *(Ironically)* He needs inspiration? *(Seriously)* Why don't we rather?

MCARTHUR *(Laughing)*—God knows we need it; only we couldn't get it—abroad or anywhere!

EDITH—Why slander yourself? As for Mr. Walter he needs hard times to key him up to concert pitch. There's a church to be built, a new town to plot. They don't interest him! If he just had to. *(Pause)* And, he'll lose business.

MCARTHUR—Pshaw! It's provoking—but his clients will have to wait till he chooses to return. There's no other Walter—and they know it. If only he could be allowed to preserve the integrity of the creative mood——

BEYOND DISILLUSION

EDITH—Twaddle! Don't you work right along? Your loyalty is—ridiculous.

McARTHUR (*Chuckling*)—You're not loyal!

EDITH—It's different in my case. I have no independent talent. I couldn't set up for myself. I have to earn my livelihood serving somebody—I am well paid here and well treated.

McARTHUR—If I talk twaddle about genius—well, what of you? I'm the fool embarrassed with that obsolete cardiac muscle. Yours is in alcohol! Parade of crassly selfish reasons for everything. Vulgar common sense (no more) for God's sake—even in religion! Up-to-date shame at all noble impulses that survive sub rosa. Wonder who's the bigger fool after all—you or I?

EDITH—Really, you forget yourself.

McARTHUR—In admiration of your inconsistency! And you expect to prove to Mr. Walter that he's wrong in wanting inspiration—(*Crosses to drawing board which he brings nearer fireplace*) if he finds he can patch up my roof?

EDITH—After such brazen speech, silence should be golden.

McARTHUR—And poking the fire the best of philosophies!

SCENE 2

(*Room has been growing darker. The screen hides Edith and McArthur from Walter, who enters from the house—stands still—irresolute a moment—then goes to the organ.*)

WALTER—Quiet at last. (*Picks up his violin out of the case, tunes it, then listens*) Feeding time at the monkey house! Poor little fiddle! (*Starts to improvise, walking up and down, and finally notices Edith and McArthur, who have been attentively listening*) Well, well. You here? In the dark?

McARTHUR—Don't let us interrupt.

WALTER—No apology. It's you, or another! Turn on the lights, will you? (*McArthur turns the switch back—electric illumination through transparencies in the ceiling*) H'm. Miraculous order!

BEYOND DISILLUSION

McARTHUR—Miss Waterman's doing.

WALTER—Thought as much.

EDITH—Laura found you!

WALTER—Yes—sent me here—told me all was quiet.

McARTHUR—And so it was.

WALTER—Suspiciously.

EDITH—What old-fashioned insinuations against sensible folk!

WALTER—Never saw such in my short life—all fools—gods and little fishes. (*Looking at board*) Something. A bear trap set for a cat bird, eh?

(*Enter Dick shouting.*)

DICK—Dinner, Pa! (*Walter stares at him*) Father, dinner.

WALTER—Barbarian!

DICK (*Humorously*)—Some have to butcher, cobble, cart refuse—to be barbarians. If I had an eye—I'd daub. If I had an ear—I'd strum or fiddle. As it is I'll compromise on a 50,000 acre ranch.

WALTER (*Turning sharply on Dick*)—Whatever you do, my son, do what you want—that's my advice—what in your inmost soul something bids you do, even if you know it will kill you. I gave up the one thing I cared for passionately because the doctors said the violin would wreck my nervous system—so, fool that I was, I took to singing with bricks and mortar.

DICK—Architecture brought you far!

WALTER—So far, yes, but how far is that? Plans are not architecture. Unless the world's ready, you can't do the thing you see. You have to keep at what the blind think they see, because the quadrumanous wretches have pawed it with all fours. Dig sewer-canals, subways, build aerial bridges, cog roads, airships, anything they think will earn dividends.

DICK—That's all mighty interesting, Father; but it's dinner time.

WALTER—I must first see what McArthur wants.

McARTHUR—The problem can wait.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

DICK—Dinners cool, and problems don't.

WALTER—Go along, old nuisance. Business first.

DICK—I'll report what you say! But you're wrong there—grub's the serious business of life.

EDITH (*Rises*)—Don't bother your father, there's a good fellow.

DICK—Auntie to rescue of the artist—against the wild man of Borneo. Ha, Ha! (*Exit.*)

WALTER—What's wrong? (*Pointing to drawing board.*)

McARTHUR—That's for you to say.

WALTER—Let me see. (*Takes drawing board—sets it on the mantel*) No style, old man. You always were a middling-poor roofist. (*Adjusts an impromptu easel*) There. (*Taking pencil*) Draw that line down—so. Wider eaves—settle it. Hat without a brim—looks cockney. There, do you see?

EVELYN (*In the entry*)—"Second call for dinner—served à la carte in the dining car—to the rear."

(*Edith and McArthur start to go.*)

EDITH—It's high time.

McARTHUR—There won't even be stale bread for us at the caravansary.

WALTER—Bah! It's my last evening. Let me show you a print—spring—absolutely and forever captured. Masses of cherry bloom—Fuji above the white clouds—and the people festive, radiant—gay color—movement everywhere—and peace broods over all—ethereal gladness. (*Runs up to the gallery for the print.*)

SCENE 3

McARTHUR—His first stroke of work for weeks. But what does it prove?

EDITH—Inspiration is not what he wants.

McARTHUR—Proves it to you, yes, but to him?

EDITH—I'll do my best to convince him.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

McARTHUR—Where's the harm if he goes? One can't have too much inspiration. I'll swear to that.

EDITH—If he doesn't need it, he oughtn't to have it.

McARTHUR—"The little more, and how much it is;
The little less, and what world's away!"

EDITH—Fiddlesticks.

McARTHUR—And Fiddles.

EDITH—Enough's enough.

McARTHUR—As for me, give me "too much."

EDITH—Quoting your mad Blake again.

McARTHUR—"Beauty is exuberance!"

EDITH—All the same, I'll make one last appeal to his conscience.
His trouble's only a morbid self-delusion. Hasn't he proved that just now?

McARTHUR—Well, I'll be gone. I'll wait for you in the office to escort you home.

EDITH—I need no bodyguard.

McARTHUR—Good luck to your efforts. (*Exit.*)

SCENE 4

(*Enter Walter.*)

WALTER (*Laying print on table*)—Where's McArthur?

EDITH—He was called out.

WALTER (*Sarcastically*)—Always chances to be, when there's a new print.

EDITH (*Comes to him*)—Begged me to bid you good-by for him if he didn't get to see you off at the station.

WALTER—An urgent call!

EDITH (*Looks at the print*)—My taste is improving, for this seems lovely at the very first glance.

WALTER—The land of enchantment. Five years ago it was—seems like yesterday.

EDITH—Why don't you take Laura along this time also?

WALTER—Wouldn't do.

EDITH—You are not running away from her—as well as the office?

WALTER—Does the bee “run away” from the hive when it flies to the sweet clover or the syringa bush?

EDITH—She'd help you get the honey out of the flower-bells and carry it to the comb.

WALTER (*Sarcastically*)—And the children? At this “critical age”? Perhaps you suggest a bureau of kindergarten travel? Leaning Tower of Pisa—stand erect in youth! Milan Cathedral—too many spires make a Gothic porcupine! You wouldn't have us do that? (*Enter Frederika and maid carrying tray, who deposits it on small folding table she places by fireside. Frederika comes up and strokes father on the head as he leans over the picture and feeds the goldfish with a part of the cracker she munches, peering over father's shoulder.*)

FREDERIKA—Cost a lot, eh?

WALTER—What's not for the Mettinghams is wanton waste.

FREDERIKA—Guess you can afford it. I brought you your dinner.

WALTER (*To Edith*)—Go in with Frederika and take my place at the table.

EDITH—McArthur is waiting for me.

WALTER—Thank you, Frederika. (*Exit Frederika*) The mountain's been brought to Mahomet—still smoking. (*Takes his violin*) My first love.

EDITH—And Laura?

WALTER—Is it words you want?

EDITH—Take her along. Mr. McArthur will look after the business, Mother Walter and I will mind the children.

WALTER—I will take her along—as she danced for me in the moonlight among the azaleas on a rock overhanging an abyss of mystery; did you ever know her? She's here—only (*pointing to his forehead*) now. You look grieved.

EDITH—Because I've failed.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

WALTER—Not altogether. If she were as loyal to her spirit as you are to the mere woman of flesh and blood—(*Enter Mother Walter from house.*)

EDITH—Good-by, and bon voyage. (*She slips away.*)

SCENE 5

MOTHER WALTER (*Looking over her glasses*)—I came over to break bread with you—and you stay away selfishly from your last meal at home!

WALTER—It's eat, eat—though the food chokes me!

MOTHER—The master of the house can occupy his seat at the end of the table——

WALTER—And exercise authority! Not my talent.

MOTHER—So you are going to Europe—for inspiration? Eh? An honest man—let me remind you, my son, finds t h a t—when he requires it—in his wife.

WALTER—As Dante in his, for instance, and the ten children?

MOTHER—Beatrice was dead!

WALTER—And Petrarch—was crowned on the capitol, I believe—laureate of the great Laura?

MOTHER—She, a married woman—and he, in orders! If you must follow a model—choose Michael Angelo. He worked.

WALTER—And never pulled off his boots from year's end to year's end—nor changed his linen. But even he adored no wife of his youth—but the noble, ancient widow lady, Vittoria Colonna!

MOTHER (*Turning sharply on him*)—Why do you trifle with your mother?

WALTER—Why do you besmirch me with vulgar insinuations? You know as well as I there is no woman in t h i s c a s e.

MOTHER—Then mark my word, there will be.

WALTER (*Impatiently*)—Is an artistic ideal necessarily a woman?

MOTHER—A woman crosses your path—puts on an innocent air—

BEYOND DISILLUSION

assumes a mystic rapture—bah, don't I know it? And you drop a ready made halo——

WALTER—On her pate—noddle—top-knot?

MOTHER—Either give up your trip, or take your wife.

WALTER (*Dryly*)—Laura and my art are mutually exclusive interests.

MOTHER—If Laura has had spirit enough to oppose a rival in advance—perhaps I'm to blame.

WALTER—So you've conscientiously poisoned her mind? And, for a practical woman—to attack our means of subsistence——

MOTHER—Tut, tut—Don't deceive yourself. We'll prosper better on plain commercial architecture.

WALTER—Though I lost my self-respect—and took prussic acid? My work depends on the mood—and the mood requires certain conditions—and I'm hoping to create them; that's all.

MOTHER—Fine spun cobwebs to catch gnats.

WALTER (*With forced laughter*)—Blue bottles and bumble-bees break through!

MOTHER—All men have to work, Richard, at what they don't like. You are no exception. If you can't get inspiration at home, or abroad with your wife, God doesn't mean you should have it. That's all. Most people get along very well without it. They do their duty. It's at least dignified.

WALTER—You mistake my case entirely. Whatever I did—I didn't do—I let happen through me. And you talk of self-direction, self-control. Who's that "self" you want to see direct and control me? The very enemy of the artist in me!

MOTHER—Do you forget that your father was a preacher of the gospel? Yet he gave up his calling to sell books.

WALTER—For filthy lucre? And you consented to have him commit sacrilege? You didn't prefer to starve?

MOTHER (*With indignant self-control*)—And what did you commit when I dedicated you to the work he abandoned for your sake—and you chose, instead, this godless business of art? And

did you resent my leaving your father to procure you the training you wanted? I think the right to admonish you has been earned by sacrifice!

WALTER—Of wifely duty to maternal passion!

MOTHER (*Losing control of herself*)—Ungrateful son!

WALTER—You force me, in self-defense, to undeceive you. Because father, according to your lights, betrayed the ideal, am I to desecrate it at your bidding?

MOTHER (*Sadly*)—Not at mine. I have long given you up for myself, my son. But, I repeat, if you loved her, whom you vowed to love until death you should part, she would suffice for your inspiration.

WALTER (*Looking strangely at his mother as if a new idea had reached him*)—You are keen-sighted—and that's your diagnosis? I don't love her—any more? Hum! I can hardly say I'm much obliged to you for the information. And if you are right—who's to blame? Who began—by undermining——

MOTHER—Do be reasonable. That was to make you see the real woman—not delude yourself with a phantom.

WALTER—Well, I tell you, she should have gone on deluding me, or somehow managed to pursue athwart motherhood and housewifery, the adorable personality I believed her to be.

MOTHER—You are utterly unreasonable! Disloyal!

WALTER—Of course I'm unreasonable, but not disloyal. She has changed her wild nature for a humdrum one, hedged in by social sanctions. I've developed my nature—such as it is—vagabond fashion. God knows how I got it from father and you. But after all, I am what I was, only more so.

MOTHER—And what is Laura now but what she really was?

WALTER—No, I tell you—And if wifehood isn't first to the wife, can the husband, whose profession must come first, if he is to succeed, continue all his life on his knees, her adorer? If she scorns to strike the chord to which he vibrates—if she tries to

make him fail in his career—isn't physical self-preservation the first law of nature—and spiritual self-preservation the first law of God?

MOTHER—Monster of selfishness.

WALTER—And you who accused me of betraying my art in marrying her—you want me now to sell my soul for her—when, by your expert knowledge, I have ceased to love her? That's reasonable! That's loyal! At bottom I am as hard and strong as you. We think differently, but both of us can will.

MOTHER—Hush! Or you will be overheard.

WALTER—I want to serve notice on the whole world. "Whoever assumes the rôle of tempter ——"

MOTHER—Will you quote that—to your mother?

WALTER—Only to the rôle you fill.

MOTHER (*Whispers*)—Shame on you. (*Low*) It's the rector!

WALTER (*Laughing grimly*)—You wanted me—once upon a time—to apply it to Laura, "Get thee behind me, Satan!"

MOTHER—The rector!

WALTER—He's welcome! Casting out devils is his specialty.

SCENE 6

(*Enter Benedict Gregg, followed by his wife, Marion.*)

MOTHER (*Assuming society manners*)—I'm so glad you have come.

GREGG (*To Walter*)—Renouncing the devil and all his works?

MOTHER (*Awkward effort at levity*)—So emphatically, it does my heart good.

GREGG—We wanted to be sure of catching you.

MARION (*Looking about*)—A dainty tray untouched——?

WALTER—No appetite.

MOTHER—Excitement at leaving his dear wife and children and—his mother. (*Exit.*)

GREGG—Go in for the dessert, we can wait.

WALTER—It's over by this.

MARION—Then I'll be off and comfort Laura, you hard-hearted wretch! (*Stops in entry*) If Richard's business were like Benedict's—weddings, funerals, patching divorces, consoling old maids and widows, all beastly bores—I don't think Laura would grieve when her husband took a trip abroad. They're always after Benedict—shoals of women—big, little, fat, lean, dark, fair. (*Coming back to her husband and caressing his face fondly*) No, I don't think I could let you go to Europe without your bodyguard, dear. One hundred would engage state-rooms on the same steamer!

GREGG (*Quietly bantering*)—Laura shows heroic confidence in her husband.

MARION—O he's not a clergyman—and then he's so safely un-attractive. (*Exit.*)

SCENE 7

GREGG (*Laughing*)—You can allow for Marion's partiality.

WALTER—Take your rocker—feet on the fender—and light your pipe.

GREGG—No, thanks.

WALTER—You look grave.

GREGG—I'm worried about the Church. Frankly, between man and man, why are you going?

WALTER—For much the same reason—that you want the Church so badly.

GREGG (*Shakes his head and looks into the fire*)—I can't help thinking a great living religion would pull you through—reconcile art with loyalty to home.

WALTER—And wouldn't need a Neo-Gothic edifice either—any hole in the ground would suffice!

GREGG—In times of persecution —

WALTER—O I don't resent your occupying men of my craft. And as long as people are willing to pay their nickel fare up to the

sheer heights once a week on a cog-road, plush seats, and a snorting engine ——!

GREGG—What are you driving at?

WALTER—Let me finish. Your job's clear. Stand at the throttle; fuel—Bible text and 30,000 thoughts indexed for preachers. Tracks laid for you—train dispatcher, road superintendent, track walkers, switchmen—all provided, while I have to lay my own tracks as I go.

GREGG—It strikes me you are making light of my profession.

WALTER—And you?

GREGG—You are too arrogant in the implied comparison.

WALTER—Hardly, saving your presence! Good priests and preachers are legion; passable artists—rare as snow in the tropics.

GREGG—Do you think irregular and irresponsible living has furthered genius? If Shelley, Tasso, Byron, Goethe—had done their social duty—they would have been greater poets. Didn't Ben Jonson talk of the impossibility of "being the good poet without first being the good man"?

WALTER—Yes, Ben Jonson—not Shakespeare, with his "dark lady"; or Marlowe, killed in a tavern brawl. It's a pretty theory and does honor to your profession—but the facts? They didn't behave—and were able to give mankind what was more precious than properest conformity: each one his special new impulse to progress.

GREGG—You talk revolution!

WALTER—And you—shop! You're here at mother's instance to catechize and exhort—and I resent it. If the great artists couldn't manage to be decent, everyday citizens—humdrum, punctual, comfortable, considerate—how can I—one of small gifts, in an age that condemns us to be freaks and pariahs—or parasites?

GREGG—Come, come. No offense was meant. I appreciate your difficulties.

WALTER—How can you? As a man of taste you like the product. But you are not candid enough as moralist to license the process by which it can alone be produced! Our methods differ, as they should. You're an interpreter, not an originator. Now with me, it's study my problem, my materials, and then drop asleep—play the fool, as you think, till the lightning strikes somewhere. Then it's work like a whirlwind—a whole hill of ants—and relapse into apathy—idiocy! But you'd have me do things your way—copy cunningly—piece together—prudently adapt. Well, if I controlled my work, it would be factitious, stale, insincere. If I controlled—myself—I should become a factory.

GREGG—I've heard most of this before, if not so effectively put; and maybe—there's some truth in it. But Laura loves you—she is, once for all, your helpmeet.

N. B. (*If Scene 2, Act I. is played in full this indictment of Laura may be cut.*)

WALTER (*Savagely exasperated, walking up and down. Gregg, at first amazed, gradually overcome with the humor*)—And haven't you inoculated her with the virus of philanthropy? Fitted her to be an artist's life-long comrade? Daubs were not enough. Domestic confusion worse confounded! New theories of letting the children educate themselves, basking in the silent radiation of parental moonshine.

GREGG—O Walter!

WALTER—Don't stop me—here goes. (*Counting on his fingers*) Monday, studying how to spread the gospel of domestic science; Tuesday, investigating the best methods of sanitary drainage; Wednesday, incontinent immediate eviction of the house fly from the slum; Thursday, extirpation of the social evil, for aught I know; Friday, suppression of the White Slave Traffic; Saturday, and to cap the climax, almoner for the Whiteside Club, investigating suspicious cases, and dispensing aid and consolation personally.

GREGG—Not so bad as that.

WALTER—Maybe I get the calendar mixed, but then between whiles—agitation for dispensaries of compound oxygen (death on diseases in the respiratory tract), and lecture courses in dietetics, with model culinary laboratories to exorcise the devils from the alimentary tract—supervised skating rinks, and the terpsichorian revival: to teach young and old in the tenements how to dance, on rising, with open windows before donning raiment—as appetizer, and guarantee of perpetual youth. All wonders and fads to improve the race, and secure a dense population to rejoice the census taker at two and a half cents per name. Symptoms all of your diabolical diseases of philanthropy!

GREGG—The bolt has fallen, and the tree is sound!

SCENE 8

(Enter maid with bill collector.)

MAID—Mr. Walter, I'm sorry to interrupt, but he insisted on being shown in. Said he had urgent private business.

WALTER—A detective with a warrant?

COLLECTOR—Excuse me—if I appear importunate—but you are leaving for a long trip to-night.

WALTER—How does that concern you?

COLLECTOR—Mr. Oldman, the art dealer, thought you would not like to leave behind his account unsettled?

WALTER—Considerate of him! *(Gets his check book)* Excuse me, Gregg, while I make this charitable soul a check? It's for a Japanese print—a rare and beautiful specimen—go look at it—on the table yonder.

GREGG—Another recruit to your unproductive army?

WALTER—It would be an unpardonable extravagance for you. To me, it's a text-book, a tool, a sacrament. *(To collector)* There's Mr. Oldman's check, and much good may it do his constitution—and see he doesn't considerably dock you of your commission.

COLLECTOR—I'm sorry I broke in on your privacy. I wish you a pleasant journey.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

WALTER—The same to you—go. (*To maid*) Please show this enterprising gentleman the shortest way out! (*Exeunt maid and collector.*)

SCENE 9

GREGG—\$250.00?

WALTER—Yes, a trifle, isn't it?

GREGG—That seems a great deal to me.

WALTER—To remit my commission on the Church was no extravagance! A bribe to St. Peter delicately tendered through you?

GREGG—I'm not here as an enemy—or busy-body—but as a brother. I don't mean to advise.

WALTER—Only diagram my state of mind—plot out my conduct?

GREGG—To forestall mistakes.

WALTER—Which you charitably construe that I didn't really intend!

GREGG—Precisely. Your anger isn't genuine—and your gayety forced. You are very much troubled. You are not the irresponsible lad you would appear. Once for all, Laura is your wife.

WALTER (*Impatiently*)—And Marion, her step-sister, is yours.

GREGG—Exactly, and my conduct is such that she is not under discussion.

WALTER (*Derisively*)—Ask Mother Walter.

GREGG (*Flushing*)—You set your art above your duty to your wife.

WALTER—You draw your stipend, don't you, for being a model husband? An asset, maybe, in your peculiar vocation. Sacrificing the Lord's business is a kind of self-sacrifice, and earns a patent of saintship. But what in my case? What have my private virtues or vices to do with my work?

GREGG—Everything, with your working power.

WALTER—Just what I'm trying to recover—to save.

GREGG—But in the wrong way. Your conscience will destroy it.

WALTER—Yours? Mine isn't troubling me.

GREGG—Sooner or later it will.

WALTER (*Eyes him narrowly*)—Are you talking, or mother? “The artist’s loyalty to his ideal, being infidelity in the man to the man’s wife? Wanted only—the fortuitous lay figure to drape in rainbows?”

GREGG—What should a very unideal man do with an ideal woman—or rather what would she do with him?

WALTER (*Sincerely*)—Suppose you had met your ideal woman? And made her your own? And life somehow touched her with an evil wind—and she became the enemy of her former self?

GREGG—Ah, loyalty—to the woman of flesh and blood, faults and all. Cry *avaunt* to the ideal you fancy she once was, lest it become a vampire.

WALTER—You preach from practice? Well, I serve you notice. I mean to go on loving the dream of my youth that haunts me still and sometimes inspires!

GREGG—It’s one—or the other. (*Pause.*)

WALTER (*Accepting the dilemma with sense of new light*)—Let it come to that, and I’ll cast out the bond woman—her of flesh and blood—for the free—her of the spirit.

GREGG—So we have joined issue at last!

WALTER—You think to unhorse me with a lance of elder-wood, and heave off my head with a sword of lath? I’ve thought out this matter pretty thoroughly for myself. Public duty overrides private? It’s patriotic—to leave mother, wife, and children, and be food for cannon at the beck of shrewd politicians?

GREGG—Your country, right or wrong!

WALTER—And it was saintly—to withdraw from the world; and still is, to underfeed, underclothe, undereducate and underbreed a numerous orthodox family, while preaching among the Mormons or the Indians—and better yet, if possible, make a luscious meal for the cannibals?

GREGG—You put it extravagantly.

WALTER (*Shaking his fist at him*)—You daren’t call the very foundation and mainstay of your religion fanaticism! (*More*

BEYOND DISILLUSION

soberly) Well—don't you see—art is the language of the soul: transmitter—preserver—procreator of a people's ideals. (*Vehe-
mently*) It's a public interest—that must be furthered by private sacrifice, cost what it may. Dionysus is the anthropophagous God, the man-eater!

GREGG—You rave like a monomaniac.

WALTER (*Bitterly*)—And laughably enough for art too—whose spirit has forsaken me!

GREGG (*Feelingly*)—You must choose, man, one or the other, sooner or later—why not now?

WALTER (*Looking at him narrowly*)—You think, then, it's a case of two masters? Art is very jealous, and will brook no rivalries? Will repel her servant—till he's cut loose from all bondage utterly! Abandons all compromises! (*Seeing light*) Ha, Ha! Dangerous for your Doctrine—the suggestions you give me!

GREGG—What suggestion—save that you rid yourself of hallucinations and obsessions—and become sane?

WALTER—Lest they possess me wholly?

GREGG—They will—if you lose your grip on realities—people, specific obligations.

WALTER—Ha, Ha! And why shouldn't they possess me? You have diagrammed my soul and plotted my conduct! Divorce! A temporary—becomes a permanent absence. Ha, Ha! And in freedom, the free spirit returns! What alternative do you leave an honest man? Since you calculate the orbit and foretell the crash—why not at once divorce?

GREGG—Divorce?

SCENE 10

(*Enter Laura, closely followed by Marion—excited, flushed—who pushes Laura aside.*)

MARION—Divorce? What have you been arguing about? (*Runs up to feel husband's forehead and temples*) Awfully agitated. Walter, you shouldn't excite him this way.

WALTER—We've been talking art and its sources.

MARION (*Laughs, relieved—then suspicious*)—All this tempest about art?

LAURA (*Quietly*)—My dear, you don't remember that it's Richard's religion.

WALTER—And the occasion of the argument, that I don't build the Church right away.

MARION—You have not been quarreling about that beastly bore of a Church?

GREGG—Just about morals and religion in general.

MARION—I knew it! I knew it! If I left you one minute alone you'd be arguing morals and religion—wasting your precious strength on morals and religion—as if true morals and religion can't get along without you.

WALTER (*Laughing*)—Yes, indeed, or a true man without morals or religion.

MARION (*Renewed agitation*)—O don't, for heaven's sake, start another discussion. I would better take him to Mother Walter—she soothes his nerves with Bible quotations, and tidbits of Emerson, Carlyle, and Browning. Come, Benedict—do come, dear. We can return when you are feeling quite yourself again.

GREGG—It is our duty to stay and help Walter recall his unfortunate decision.

MARION—Oh his business is his business.

(*While this little scene proceeds—evidently a usual performance—Walter approaches Laura, who goes to the tray.*)

WALTER—Thank you for the supper, Laura.

LAURA—You didn't touch it.

WALTER—Couldn't. The thought of leaving—

LAURA (*Brightening*)—I told you so—it would be useless—Like that trip years ago—when you fell ill. You were so homesick. Do, at least, put it off.

WALTER (*Somberly*)—What's to be gained postponing the evil day? I haven't done a stroke of work.

LAURA—That thing for McArthur?

BEYOND DISILLUSION

WALTER—That bit of smudging? I mean, something that would stir the pool and make it bubble from the bottom.

GREGG—The Church doesn't do that?

WALTER—Hardly.

LAURA—But if I gave you a chance to do your ideal house—unlimited means—half a million to begin with?

WALTER—For Mr. and Mrs. Hogbarrow and little Hogbarrows—a Gothic Castle or a Venetian palace in the desert?

LAURA—Only a Petit Trianon—true Louis XIV—on the brow of a hill—peering through the Golden Gate out at the Farlone islands.

MARION (*Ironically*)—That would be art, but Benedict's Church—O no!

LAURA—You could take your trip with an easier conscience.

WALTER—After pocketing the fat fee of your man?

LAURA—First, it's a woman; second, she's head over heels in love with your work, and you can make her do what you will. I don't suggest harnessing Pegasus to plow or harrow, only I do beg you to ride him!

WALTER—And put him up at the common livery stable.

(*Laura pays no attention, but goes out cheerfully.*)

GREGG—It's a hard word, surely—livery stable—for your beautiful home.

WALTER—Madhouse would describe it better, where Pegasus gets the blind staggers.

MARION—Do come to Mother Walter's. He's just trying to pick a quarrel. Can't you see it? These crazy artists!

SCENE 11

(*Enter Laura, escorting Helen—who meet Marion and Gregg and prevent their exit.*)

LAURA (*To Walter*)—Miss Helen Darniell—we find we were at school together.

HELEN—Ages ago!

WALTER—These days we take no note of time, Miss Darniell.

LAURA—Helen wishes you to find out what she really wants, and build it for her. (*Introduces Marion and Gregg*) Now we'll leave you.

MARION—For a little artistic seance—tête à tête. (*To Gregg*) Thank heaven, you're no artist.

LAURA—Amen.

MARION (*Turning on her*)—Eh? Think he's not fit to be one? (*Exeunt Marion, Laura and Gregg.*)

SCENE 12

HELEN—Perfectly adorable house—a real architect's—what shall I call it—bungalow?

WALTER—Caravansary.

HELEN—O yes—of course—that's the technical term!

WALTER (*Shoving in front of her the Japanese print*)—And what do you think of this?

HELEN—It's rapturous—there's such a lot of it too—but—to tell you the truth, I'm not sure I understand it.

WALTER—It's no argument for immortality.

HELEN—Not quite natural, you know—

WALTER—Frankly—what does it look like?

HELEN—A procession of brown bogies—holding up loaded trays of whipped cream, and a skylight cone of lemon sherbet back of them.

WALTER—Why not—brown bogies lathered for a shave rather?

HELEN—Yes, of course! How droll!

WALTER (*Laughs derisively*)—Very.

HELEN—You are just guying—making fun of me, I mean.

WALTER—Take a seat.

HELEN—Sure it isn't a dentist's chair?

WALTER—Worse. I'm going to translate that for you into another tongue. You care for music?

HELEN—What I understand—rag-time and such like—and grand opera when it happens along, and everybody turns out for it.

WALTER (*Plays a few bars on his violin*)—Well—do you understand this better?

HELEN—No, but it's wonderful.

WALTER (*Points to the picture*)—So's that! I could do nothing that would really interest y o u.

HELEN—But I want what would interest y o u!

WALTER—A ready made palace, eh, for a ready made soul? And I can only build for a living soul—free of the past, sincerely true to the present, unabashed at the future—uncowed by eternity. (*Putting violin and bow into the case and snapping it with the last word.*)

HELEN—Honestly, Mr. Walter, that's the sort of person I want to be—and really thought I was.

WALTER (*Jocosely*)—Until I was so exceedingly rude?

HELEN—I don't mind what you say—so you build for me.

WALTER—I'm afraid—I'd have to educate you, and I haven't the patience, any more.

HELEN—O I'd heard you were——

WALTER—Queer!

HELEN—No, Qui—quixotic—quihotic, I mean, and would put me through a sort of physical examination.

WALTER—Heart test, lung test, blood test.

HELEN—Brain test, I suppose. But you can't discourage me. You tell me what you could build if I paid for it.

WALTER—I could only dream my dream for you, if, looking at you, I divined your possible spirit; I should have to build for that spirit the home t h a t would suit its life—one you are not living and don't mean to live——

HELEN—A home for my possible spirit? A mausoleum—that's just what I wanted all along.

WALTER—A sort of museum for the muse—and would you recognize it when you saw it?

HELEN—I don't know, but I'll put a half a million into it. You are to build what you want—not what I want. I'll agree to want it, when it's built! (*She rushes to the door—calls out*) Laura! Laura!

WALTER—Wait a minute.

HELEN—I won't, you might change your mind.
(*Enter Laura.*)

HELEN—O I'm so glad—he's agreed to build for me!

LAURA (*To Walter*)—For her?

WALTER—Hardly—but for her possible spirit.

HELEN—O yes, I forgot. That's downright uncanny—mystic—delicious, isn't it? Nobody ever thought before of my possible spirit. My spook!

LAURA—He means—what you ought to be.

WALTER—What you owe yourself to become.

HELEN—Never fear, I'll pay for it. My, but it will be exciting!

LAURA (*To Walter*)—So you won't leave to-night.

WALTER—I'll wire and take the next steamer.

LAURA—How can you do it in that time?

WALTER—The inspiration has come.

LAURA—So sudden?

WALTER—When she asked me to build my dream of a home—for a free spirit.

HELEN—O how I envy you your husband—all your caterpillars turn butterflies, swallow tails, with him.

WALTER (*Grimly*)—And your wrigglers—mosquitoes?

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 13

(*Enter Mother Walter, Benedict Gregg—Marion lagging after him—dusting his shoulders fussily.*)

MOTHER WALTER (*Sternly*)—My son, there's no free spirit—even you are bound.

WALTER (*Teasingly*)—At all events Miss Darniell still boasts of single blessedness!

HELEN—O it's I who am to become a free spirit.

MOTHER (*Turning with knowing frown on Laura*)—Didn't I tell you so?

LAURA—If Helen wants Richard to build what suits his fancy should you or I object?

MARION (*Piqued*)—Yet he refused to stop over to do Benedict's Church.

WALTER (*Irritated*)—Mightn't be a house for a free spirit.

MOTHER—Shocking! A house of God?

HELEN—God's turn—I'm not the only one to catch it!

MOTHER (*To Walter*)—Take that back!

GREGG (*Deprecatingly*)—He doesn't mean it.

WALTER (*Eyeing him narrowly*)—But I do. I owe you something for your diagramming my state of soul. Is your God free? or has He an ear to the ground and eye on the pew rents? "Give me light," prays His pious minister—but be sure it agrees with that of my student's lamp! "Teach me Thy will," but while you're about it, see, dear Lord, for heaven's sake, you don't violate any of our decent social customs! So your God isn't a free spirit!

MARION (*To Benedict*)—I won't have you stop to be insulted.

WALTER (*Derisively*)—If the cap fits him, he ought to go. Seriously all I have said is—I'll help Miss Darniell spend half a million.

MARION—Good-by, Madam Half Million.

(*Marion goes out, followed by her husband.*)

BEYOND DISILLUSION

WALTER—Bravo!—save the parson's ears—and soul, if you can, from the truth.

LAURA (*To Helen*)—You mustn't take offense. Marion is a privileged character.

HELEN (*Perplexed*)—Well, if I am Madam Half Million, and am destined to become a free spirit some day and live in the mausoleum your husband's going to build for me (*turning to Walter*) I must begin at least by being straight now. I don't yet have that sum—but as soon as you agree to build——

WALTER—You'll rub Aladdin's Lamp?

HELEN—An old suitor—I've refused again and again—saw how I took a wild fancy for one of your dwelling houses, and offered me a wonderful site, and all it would cost to have you build on it. So I directly crossed the continent.

WALTER—You'd marry a man—you don't love—to build yourself a mansion in the sky? Not a barn for you—not a dog kennel—not a dove cote. Never.

MOTHER (*To Laura*)—It isn't as bad as I feared after all—not yet anyhow.

WALTER (*Turning sharply on Laura*)—I go as I planned.

MOTHER—Fie on you, boy! Insult your client when you're offered a flattering commission—any sensible man would bless his stars, if it came his way—and then unfeelingly you disappoint your wife! She had hoped to induce you to postpone your ridiculous trip, and so had I. (*To Helen*) He's not responsible, Madam, he has spells like this now and then. He'll yet come to his senses by and by and build you anything you order. (*Taking out Helen.*)

SCENE 14

(*Laura throws window open by window seat. Sits down lackadaisical, hands in lap, by the window—hair flies in the wind. Snow fall is lit up by electric light of the street. Laura stares into it fixedly.*)

WALTER—What do you see in the snow fall?

LAURA—Nothing.

WALTER—It falls steadily, but the flakes are so large—they won't lie——

LAURA—Thaw to slush and mud!

WALTER (*Going for his print*)—Care to examine my latest pet? (*Laura shakes her head*) Very like the scene we admired together: Fuji glistening and calm—above a long blossoming “pergola”—the people full of the joy of the spring. (*He looks at the print himself, then curiously at Laura. Getting his violin*) Your favorite allegro ——?

LAURA (*Eyeing him sternly*)—Should I dance to your fiddling?

WALTER (*Greatly amazed*)—Oh! Into your coffin, little baby!

LAURA (*Looking up wearily*)—Why don't you lay me in mine?

WALTER (*Would be cheerily*)—For obvious reasons—we're not dead yet. Because awkward difficulties face us which we cannot help, don't let us be angry, and wantonly devise others.

LAURA—You use the plural—intending the singular. What mischief am I now about?

WALTER (*Takes off shelf—near center—book after book and tosses it on the floor. Speaks between whiles*)—When we were—what we are no more—we met young love. Can't we, for his by-gone sweetness' sake, show charity and mercy—be reasonable and just? (*She looks at him bewildered and inquiringly*) Only guide books I forgot. (*Gets his suit case—and repacks to make room for them*) You say nothing?

LAURA (*With audible restraint*)—I cannot be so dispassionate and philosophical. I will not deny that I did love you—and with all loyal people—to love once is to love forever.

WALTER (*Tries hard to shut the case*)—Footlight superstition: Plato and Company—chiefly the company.

LAURA—And “inspiration”?

WALTER (*Shutting the case triumphantly*)—Love and inspiration are both mere states of consciousness—dependent on specifiable conditions. Can the sails belly out in the wind that's died down?

LAURA—And we're paralyzed—Have no will power?

WALTER—Will—love? inspiration? Never. Their conditions? Sometimes!

LAURA (*Coming up to him*)—And love—can't create what it feeds on—loveliness? Do I love you for your virtues? Or hate you for your faults? If I am what I seem to you, is it all my doing?

WALTER—You are so passionate—so intense—I envy you. All I know is I'm bored—worried—spiritually dead. I feel nothing keenly enough to escape tedium.

LAURA—And you feel nothing for me?

WALTER—Infinite pity.

LAURA—And for yourself, Richard?

WALTER—A sickening contempt.

LAURA (*Hopefully*)—You have moods—desperate moods. So have I. We were drawn to one another by—divine discontent: a quest together of the ideal.

WALTER—Sentimentalizing now can't bring to life again our old lost happiness. But a comradeship might have been possible—based on acknowledgment of inevitable changes: the wholesome summer fruit of the wind-strown bloom of spring.

LAURA—So it's my fault. I've let your love for me die—like a nodding nurse that drops off her knees her little child onto the fender to its death. And I can't foresee, and adroitly fit into, your shifting moods. The whole household irks you. Should we have put our children away—because they are troublesome? Was it I who imported into our home—the influence to undermine our self-respect and mutual regard—with insinuated disapproval at every turn?

WALTER (*Impatiently*)—A blunder! The younger generation had a right to its chance. You should have protested when I proposed to settle her next door.

LAURA—Your mother, Richard? When you were so bent on the plan?

WALTER—There's no gain in vulgar recriminations. Granted it was my fault—reviewing causes won't alter effects. It is you who can't accept the fact that we have changed. Once—you cast a spell on me—that made for art. Now you don't, that's all. Is it my fault? Is it yours? Gradually you ceased being my comrade, sank yourself in housewife and mother. (*Waving silence to her interruption*) Economizing for me! My children—of course, I understand. But you wouldn't hire competent service and release yourself for me. Then, because you couldn't help seeing—to blind yourself—you set about being frantically busy with other people's affairs. (*Waving off interruption again*) O, of course. To bring new interests into my life—or to spare me from the distraction of social duties—entirely for my sake. I understand. Not either because you loved these things, O no. You always perversely—on principle—forced yourself into what you and I most hate.

LAURA (*Sincerely*)—But Richard—what's the meaning of duty? What we have no taste for, or talent—isn't that God's will for us?

WALTER (*Fiercely*)—And suppose your duty had been much easier—merely helping me to the conditions of my life's work?

LAURA (*Bitterly*)—Called to be your Egeria? At your beck, striking the right chord to which your soul vibrates? Should not one hire expert service for that also?

WALTER—You don't understand!

LAURA—I'm not such a dullard but that I have my lesson by heart. A genius is an exceptional being. The law is for commonplace individuals. They are replaceable. So they must obey. Their survival is not so important as the contemporary maintenance of moral tone—the safety of the next generation. Pah! And you are a genius—not replaceable, whose peculiar faculty must be exercised at all cost. Buddha had a right to desert his wife—it became him—was godly in him. It was imperial of Napoleon to divorce Josephine, and so on with Goethe and Bismarck and the rest.

WALTER (*Surprised*)—And I've indoctrinated you with such heresies? (*Laughing*) There's truth in them, all the same. As an artist, though a very modest and insignificant one, I suffered one great disappointment. You wouldn't let me throw myself away. So I can sing just one little song—two or three notes in a monotonous rhythm. And now—I can't sing it. There's my hell! And you, somehow—and the children and this parson (that compromises morally, and lies ecclesiastically), and that mother of mine, who would have me abjure any ideal you aren't lucky enough at the time to represent, and all the smug pew-rent-paying hucksters and muck-mongers—have contrived, innocently of course—(and altogether for my sake, who knows)—so that I can't sing my poor little song!

LAURA (*Amazed*)—What devil has possessed you?

WALTER—Some words of the Uncompromising One which mother taught me ring in my ears: "Whosoever loveth father or mother or wife or child more than me, is not worthy of me." And that "M e" is, in my case, my work. You declared war on it.

LAURA (*At a loss*)—I have been proud of your success.

WALTER—As my success—not for its own sake.

LAURA—I married the man—not the artist. What I loved was your soul.

WALTER—Soul? Loved? Those words, I fear, have faded out for me to sound. If you mean that adolescent, vague expectation and panicky thrill—all the magic which nature throws on us to lure us, poor besotted creatures, from our own private end to hers—surely that's well over for me, and I fancy for you; and the changeling you cherish is an ache—a gnawing sorrow—a cruel disappointment.

LAURA (*Trying to see the humor of things*)—This is all very bad, and I suppose we'll have to reform—and meanwhile, you satisfy the wander-lust—the gypsy strain in the blood—the attack will pass.

WALTER—We can't reform—and—I won't return.

LAURA (*Startled*)—But Richard—I am your wife!

WALTER—I don't deny my obligation to support you.

LAURA—Put me on a pension? And the children—o u r children?

WALTER—I owe them a start in life—and I'll discharge my debts.

LAURA—But love?

WALTER—I've never been much to them. It's a pity, but I haven't any parental feeling. If love means willingness to sacrifice—if necessary, you can sell all my Japanese prints.

LAURA—Richard! Enough of this hideous jest. Desert us, never to return?

WALTER—Never.

LAURA—But I love you!

WALTER—It's that love of yours that I dread—and hate. For it's only the property instinct gone mad. You own me! I am yours.

LAURA—It's me then you hate? Because some Vision of the Dawn has crossed your path—some breath of a new spring?

WALTER—Laura—I can't have you think so meanly of the woman I have loved. It was you—it is you—or nobody. To break with our past—is death. True we fag, and crave variety; but beneath the craving is the deep necessity for continuity—loyalty—truth—to one's self. It's the same who must be many—it's the old must turn new. Our change demands a corresponding change—that keeps pace with our progress ahead of us—intenser in measure of our greater need. (*Takes out of a portfolio her likeness and puts it in his satchel*) You see—it was you—for me.

LAURA—Ah, Richard, then you will return.

WALTER—Never, so help me God. Because it's you no longer. And don't suppose I sha'n't regret our fate. I leave my highest hopes behind. The art, that I dreamed, can't be through me; for nothing can come out of my life that's gracious and winsome. But I'll save what I can out of the wreck.

LAURA—You can't, you sha'n't go! You can't do without me. You are mine, Richard.

WALTER—Ah, what did I say? Vested interests—you see? And I reply, No—I'm no slave, not yours, not my own, to regulate as

a machine—but God's; and that is why—there's nothing for me to do but go.

LAURA—Richard.

WALTER—It's a mutual emancipation. You rebelled at sinking yourself in me? You were right! We are free now to attain, each of us, to our best self. And we may even, in course of time, come to cherish the sacred memories we share. It is cruel—but it is.

LAURA—I'll never release you by loving you no longer. Maybe, I'll love you more—for doing your duty as you see it—because you force me to start on the awful quest—of what I'm not.

WALTER—Now you are making it hard for me. Very hard——

LAURA—Stay then—and we'll make a fresh start. We will each try to help the other to his ideal.

WALTER—Self-deception! Only another sacrifice—a claim to urge on me later; something from outside: not the spontaneous, inevitable outburst from within—that casts a spell—that breathes the overmastering charm. I've seen it with terrible clearness to-day. It would be sin—death—to turn back. It could only add to my remorse, and to your anguish.

LAURA—The world's round, Richard, and swings in a closed orbit.

WALTER—Good-by.

LAURA—Go! (*After he's gone*) Poor—blind—mad fool!

Curtain

ACT III

MOTHER OR WOMAN

ACT III

(*Pictures of Walter and Laura placed in front of the organ pipes; budding lilac boughs are hung about the room; Chinese lilies near the window; goldfish on the other side of the organ; effort to indicate on the stage that the retrospective adolescent ideal of marriage has become occult in spite of the formal divorce.*)

SCENE 1

(*Enter Dick, newspaper in hand.*)

DICK—Auntie Edith! Nobody here? Playing truant for mother's wedding day; I must talk to somebody about this. At all events, mother can't be allowed to see this sheet. (*Spreads the paper on the table*) Engaged to be married, eh? Father? Waiting till the divorce decree takes effect? A black lie! But it would spoil her fun just the same. (*Looking about*) Whew! Cold as the North Pole! Windows wide open; fire almost out. (*Stirs up the fire, fans it with paper, then sticks the paper into the fire*) Well, this particular copy won't make any more mischief. In the nick of time!

SCENE 2

(*Laura enters, tired and dispirited.*)

DICK—No blues to-day, Mother. (*He makes her sit down*) Nobody's behind the screen; mail piled up unopened! You're cold. Make yourself comfy. (*Shuts the window*) Lilies done for!

LAURA—What, Dick?

DICK—Fresh air cure for new disease—Longevity. Last goldfish turned acrobat, floating on his back!

LAURA—Dead? (*Rushes over to see.*)

DICK—Wanted ozone for the new Ballet. Maids won't discriminate in applying general orders.

LAURA—It is not the maids.

DICK—Martyrs in a good cause. Had to be promoted sometime, you know.

LAURA—It's an omen, Dick.

DICK—Bah! Who's superstitious?

LAURA—They were your father's.

DICK—Get others, he won't know the difference—by wireless, and then, what of the omen?

LAURA—But you see, Dick, I've been thinking—and when a mis-giving you haven't dared to admit to yourself is spoken out loud ——. Do you really believe your father will ever return? I have tried to bring the beauty he loved into the house, and Auntie Edith has helped bring the peace and the poise.

DICK (*Looking about*)—Lovely decorations, and thank goodness, Botheringhams departed this life as far as we're concerned.

LAURA—But I've had no satisfaction in anything.

DICK—You've done some pretty fine dancing.

LAURA—Amateurish—waste of time. I thought he would have been back long before this.

DICK—Anyhow he'll come back; see if he doesn't, and you are right, just the same, in keeping the day.

LAURA—You haven't lost faith yet in your parents? The scandal—the mortification?

DICK—Bah! Other people, mother, haven't sense enough to know they're in trouble, or are afraid to face their faults. I'm proud of father, and I'm just as proud of you.

LAURA—Thank you, Dick, you've helped me. (*Dancing master is announced by maid.*)

DICK—You're tired; let him come up here to you. (*To the maid*) Show him up. (*To his mother*) Now I'll cremate the lilies in style, and the cat will give the fish decent burial free of charge. Just keep up your spirits, and we'll make the omens go by contraries. (*Dick carries out the fish bowl in mock gravity; bows to the dancing master as they pass.*) Take care, no head-on collisions. H o there! Haven't my cow-catcher on. (*Exit into the house.*)

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 3

DANCING MASTER—You'll excuse me; I was told—— (*Dancing master looks at decorations in surprise.*)

LAURA—My wedding anniversary, you know.

DANCING MASTER (*Evincing more surprise*)—I intrude?

LAURA—A household day, kept for the children's sake.

DANCING MASTER (*Dryly*)—An excellent custom.

LAURA (*Shows him to a seat by the fire*)—I haven't practised my two hours to-day.

DANCING MASTER—Thought as much.

LAURA—How could you tell?

DANCING MASTER—You'd look fresher; more cheerful. A good conscience and the magic of perfect motion rest the nerves. I see we shall have to discontinue our lessons.

LAURA (*With forced smile*)—You musn't try, Mr. Lightfoot, to manage me with threats.

DANCING MASTER (*Soberly*)—It is dishonest to take money when one is not allowed to render a fair equivalent.

LAURA—You do not know how much you have done for me already.

DANCING MASTER—That's the very point! Everything! And you nothing. Shall I let you go on deceiving yourself? And to-day after I saw—(*Laura stares up at him, startled, then he recovers himself*)—the error of our ways.

LAURA—But you aroused hopes, Mr. Lightfoot.

DANCING MASTER—To fulfil which, you remember, you were to give up everything.

LAURA (*Justifying herself*)—I wish I could, heaven knows, but I have duties.

DANCING MASTER—Duties are often trees of the garden, behind which we hide from the Lord.

LAURA—Mr. Lightfoot, can I for any vocation, however dear, cease to be a mother?

DANCING MASTER—And perhaps you owe those children—now more than ever—to conquer your independence, to establish by definite achievement your right to their respect. You would have them be thorough, real, sincere? Carry through whatever they undertake at all costs?

LAURA—I know—only too well. Of course you can see no reason why I shouldn't delegate to competent experts those duties which done unscientifically only destroy my life; but the essence of those services is the spirit in which they are discharged. How could hirelings or strangers, even their grandmother, take my place?

DANCING MASTER—I am not here to argue with you. My heart goes out to you in pity because you cannot see your way to become a free woman—a fit mother of free men with a career of your own.

LAURA—Mother has been speaking to you?

DANCING MASTER—What she urged has had no weight with me. For some time I have been expecting—but haven't had the courage—till this morning. You deserve from me at least the truth.

LAURA—But I also want your help. I do so much need to forget everything in something; and nothing has ever taken hold of me like the dance as you teach it: as a means of expression for our very inmost self. It is merciful sometimes to keep up an innocent self-delusion.

DANCING MASTER—Sacred things shouldn't be administered as anodynes for private griefs. We are back at the old point. (*Rises from chair*) Anything worth while asks all there is of us: strength, devotion, courage. But while I insist on arousing you, I am not unappreciative—wilfully unkind—in fact I have come to you with a proposition. If you'll stop making believe that you run a house, rear a family, reform the poor, etc., and will definitely devote yourself to the art you love, I will launch you in good earnest and without charge.

LAURA—I could never consent to incur so large a debt to you.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

DANCING MASTER—It is I should be in your debt. I am no longer young. All these years I have striven to have my ideal realized. And as one gets older one begins to fear one's dreams will turn out only dreams, and dissipate. To see the ancient dance revived: not the dismal, imbecile, semi-lascivious whirly-gig of hop and glide; but the sequence of holy and glorious attitudes in exquisite melody; pleasure, worship, thanksgiving, ecstasy, sorrow, despair, fortitude, self-sacrifice, vision of God—all the gamut of the soul! Is not that enough?

LAURA—And could I even now realize your ideal?

DANCING MASTER (*Evidently puzzled*)—Now? (*Solemnly, after a pause*) I do not understand. But this much is true. Sorrow initiates the artist, fits him to speak out of the hidden depths. And you are the only pupil I ever had with the right temperament, the quick hospitality to ideas, the absolute response to inspiration. All you require is discipline, and the total self-consecration necessary for discipline.

LAURA—If it isn't youth and beauty, but the idea, the spontaneous motion, the kindling spirit—can't I put it off until the children are grown up?

DANCING MASTER—And what of my last years? Oh, you are selfish and foolish to boot. (*Laughs cruelly*) Cedric grown up! His wild oats sown? His professional career under way? Meanwhile you're grandmother to the babies of the older children! Never! No, break off definitely. Die to your past. You have a right now, if ever; adopt a new name, start over. You'll forgive me if I've spoken harsh things honestly.

LAURA—If you only knew how my whole being craves this very thing you urge! Oh, you are very cruel. But I cannot yet. He might return. It is for his sake.

DANCING MASTER—For his sake?

LAURA (*Looking dancing master straight in the eyes*)—Yes, his sake.

DANCING MASTER—Then I say too, "For his sake." .

BEYOND DISILLUSION

LAURA—Perhaps you are right. If I can see it your way—Come to dinner at seven o'clock. I must settle this to-day.

DANCING MASTER—All or nothing, mind you. I'll try to be on time, but don't wait for me. If you haven't decided to-night for the peace of us both, I'll withdraw my offer.

LAURA—It shall be then——

DANCING MASTER—Or never.

SCENE 4

MOTHER WALTER—What is put off till to-night, daughter?

LAURA—My decision. (*Scanning her steadily.*)

MOTHER WALTER—Ah, a good resolution on your wedding day?

LAURA—The second without Richard.

MOTHER WALTER (*Sarcastically*)—To give up the Dance?

LAURA—Who knows? Your unsolicited interference resulted unexpectedly. Mr. Lightfoot offers me my training free.

MOTHER WALTER—The traitor! But you must be father to the children as well as mother.

LAURA (*Aroused*)—When did I contract double parenthood?

MOTHER WALTER—The day you drove my son away.

LAURA (*Coldly sarcastic*)—What if others helped?

MOTHER WALTER (*Pause*)—Ungrateful girl! When I labored so hard to hold him! And had you not granted him the divorce?

LAURA—Oh, Mother, can't you understand? It was to bring him home in the end.

MOTHER WALTER—I do really begin to believe you care for him. Surely you wouldn't desert his children.

LAURA—What if I owed it to these same children to make myself independent of the pension he may dole out to his ex-wife?

MOTHER WALTER—You will act once more on impulse and passion, and not on principle?

LAURA—And become, since I drove him away, the woman to draw him back again?

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 5

(Enter Marion.)

MARION—Laura! Laura!

MOTHER WALTER—I'm glad you've come. Laura needs you to cheer her up.

MARION—I'm a specific for the blues, and ought to be able to impart sound second-hand doctrine. You see, Laura, I've just come from a card party.

MOTHER WALTER—In the morning? A clergyman's wife?

MARION—It's the way to get the news—and I tell you, I'm glad for Laura's sake I went. People are talking: Mr. McArthur stays in the house.

LAURA—Well? Isn't my trouble a protection?

MOTHER WALTER—Dear me, no! Only an incentive. Makes you—as Benedict puts it—interesting psychological material for vivisection.

LAURA—Isn't Edith in the house too?

MARION—Edith a protection? Can't you understand? Richard's pupil and his stenographer in league to get his business—house and everything. Nonsense of course. But then ——

MOTHER WALTER—Really, Marion, I think I am next door.

MARION—Exactly! Next door! Ha! Ha!

(Enter servant announcing lunch.)

MARION—Oh, here I'm gadding, and Benedict needs me!

SERVANT—Mr. McArthur and Miss Dwight have telephoned not to expect them—they are detained.

MARION—You see? *(To servant)* Miss Dwight for both?

SERVANT—No, Ma'am.

MARION—All the worse, you see—they've got a guilty conscience. I'm a clairvoyant in such things. Good-by. Must be off. I'll be at dinner to-night. But Benedict, I'm sure, can't come.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 6

MOTHER WALTER—You wouldn't, when people are talking so dreadfully, give them cause? Independence is all very fine, up to date, I grant you, and romantic; but for a mother of four children it is not practical. You need more, and not less income from the same source.

LAURA—I may seem to you fantastic, full of freaks and notions—but I'm no patient Griselda. Richard sha'n't be let off with a money indemnity by me, and suppose he can leave Mr. McArthur as his convenient substitute; he sha'n't follow the corpse of his meek and mercenary pensioned ex-wife, with a second companion on his arm, shedding tears over my demise for joy at the timely economy! A man can't reckon on maternal duty forever to keep a woman still, when he has failed in his conjugal duties!

MOTHER WALTER—You astonish me! And you keep this anniversary?

LAURA—Because, in spite of you, I still believe in him; if I did not ——

MOTHER WALTER—Well, what would you do?

LAURA—Leave! Live my own life!

MOTHER WALTER—You are out of your senses, poor child.

LAURA—You could be Grandmother, Grandfather, Father, and Mother.

MOTHER WALTER—I will not stay to hear words you will repent.
(*Exit.*)

LAURA—Oh, if I only knew—then I might have the strength to refuse this offer of freedom—of self-expression.—if deep down in his soul he is still mine—I could wait—yes, forever. But if not, I cannot endure this life longer. (*Noise of the children. She gets up with heroic effort at self-control*) Pandemonium broken loose. To-day I must decide. (*Exit.*)

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 7

(Edith enters cautiously from conservatory, tidies the office, part of the music room on the left.)

MCARTHUR *(Coming behind Edith)*—A kiss to the bride is in order.

EDITH—No nonsense in business hours!

MCARTHUR—Who says it's nonsense?

EDITH—A man shouldn't flirt with his typewriter.

MCARTHUR—Even after ——?

EDITH—Least of all then. It's a common-sense partnership, ours; and business is business. *(Makes the fire blaze and looks to the radiators. Looks about)* Goldfish gone; lilies gone; queer.

MCARTHUR—Are you so sure it will be a pleasant surprise?

EDITH—It ought to be. Stops outrageous gossip. Puts us in the natural place of Laura's protectors. Partners with her in every respect.

MCARTHUR—Well, you know more about social affairs than I. Anything in the mail?

EDITH—Bills and advertisements; it takes a monster waste-basket these days.

MCARTHUR—Nothing more?

EDITH—No, Sir. But the second mail is not yet due.

MCARTHUR—Well, I'll dictate that letter then. *(Edith settles down to work. McArthur walks up and down dictating)* "Dear Walter: Edith and I are married. This will, I think, make matters easier for Laura. As to your generous ——" *(Interrupting himself)* wait a bit—"thoughtless ——"

EDITH—unqualified?

MCARTHUR *(Shaking his head)*—"proposition to sell me the business, I can never entertain it."

EDITH—Why shouldn't you?

MCARTHUR—I thought you were my typewriter?

EDITH—Can't a typewriter have thoughts?

McARTHUR—If she keeps them to herself. (*Continues dictation*)
“Such an arrangement would not sufficiently protect the interests of your family. It is not a tax on my earning power as you put it——”

EDITH—But that’s exactly what it is!

McARTHUR (*Waives objection and dictates*)—“because I couldn’t earn one-tenth of what I do, were it not for the prestige of the office.”

EDITH—You are entirely too modest.

McARTHUR (*Continues dictation*)—“I will agree to partnership on the basis of one-third interest for the sum you suggest.”

EDITH—But, Arthur, that isn’t right!

McARTHUR (*Half in fun*)—I thought business was business!

EDITH—I can’t consent to a permanent drain on you.

McARTHUR—Has that little trip to the Mayor’s office so completely changed your point of view?

EDITH—Haven’t you your career to make?

McARTHUR—Ah, I see. My career! And you, the incarnation of propriety and honor, would have me take advantage of Walter’s utter lack of business sense, and leave Laura to struggle along on the interest, say 6 per cent., upon \$20,000—\$1,200 income per annum, when so far, though the business has been bad, after all our salaries have been paid, she had over \$50,000. That would be fair, eh? (*Proceeds with dictation*) “We will board with Laura. One household will mean economy and you can invest the amount which I pay ——”

EDITH (*Astonished*)—You pay! How?

McARTHUR—My father will lend me the sum.

EDITH—On what security?

McARTHUR—On account of my portion of the estate he will some day leave me. Seeing you will help me like a modern wife to husband my resources. (*Dictates*) “You can get your new friend, Mr. Blake, to invest the small sum for Laura at good interest. I stand ready to send you a draft for the whole amount

when you have sent me the legal papers of partnership for my signature."

EDITH—So you leave everything to him?

McARTHUR (*Chuckling*)—Well I see I am promoted without desert in your eyes from number two to number one. For changing the center of the solar system, the suburban village Mayor answers about as well as an Archbishop!

SCENE 8

(*Enter Dick.*)

DICK—A special delivery letter (*Looks at it*) from Father; marked confidential. (*Hands the book to McArthur*) Sign here. I want to know what's in it.

McARTHUR—Can't you read Con-fid-en-tial?

DICK—Oh, that's very well. I don't want to pry in y o u r business, but anything that concerns mother, I've got to know. Father told me to look out for her, and after what appeared in this morning's paper——

EDITH—What, Dick?

DICK—Lies!

EDITH—Where's the paper?

DICK—Safe. Where it won't spoil Mother's anniversary. (*Points to the fire.*) Give me the book, I'm off. But mind you, Mr. McArthur, what concerns Mother, I've got to know, if it is confidential. I guess I can hold my tongue. (*Exit.*)

McARTHUR—We've got to reckon with him!

EDITH—I always told you so.

McARTHUR—Wait a minute. (*Takes the letter.*)

EDITH—Haven't I a right to know?

McARTHUR—It isn't addressed to Arthur McArthur & Co. Is it? (*Edith gets up and busies herself about the files while McArthur reads.*)

McARTHUR (*Reading*)—Humph! Pretty serious. That won't do.

EDITH—Of course not. You've got to tell me what's in that letter.

MCARTHUR—Please get the copy of this morning's paper.

EDITH—Around the corner? (*Starts to go.*)

MCARTHUR—Stop. It's no use. You'll have to find out sooner or later. There's idle talk, Walter says, about himself and Helen Darneill. He believes it can't be kept out of the Pacific Coast "Tattler," and fears Laura will do something foolish. He declares there's no truth in the report of an impending engagement, but he wants it clearly understood that he considers himself free to act as may seem best to him when he has the legal right to remarry.

EDITH—So we've acted barely in time.

MCARTHUR—To take things into our own hands.

EDITH—And Walter can be so irresponsible and saddle his cares on you!

MCARTHUR (*Surprised*)—On me? Isn't he the man who has made me, and who gives me now a chance to amount to something, and you the chance to act unselfishly by your friend?

EDITH (*Ironically*)—Laura, of course, is to remain a perpetual infant in arms, while she is allowed to think she manages the whole creation?

SCENE 9

(*Enter Mother Walter*)

MOTHER WALTER—Can I have—(*Looks at Edith*)—a private interview?

MCARTHUR—With Edith?

MOTHER WALTER—No, with you.

EDITH (*Rising*)—I'll go for that paper.

MCARTHUR—Through the conservatory!

EDITH—Never fear.

MCARTHUR—How can I serve you?

MOTHER WALTER—Me? Have you ever known me to think of self? It's about my daughter's affairs.

McARTHUR—To be sure.

MOTHER WALTER—She's applied, would you believe it? for a position with the Associated Charities.

McARTHUR—I thought she had done with philanthropy!

MOTHER WALTER—As a pastime.

McARTHUR—But I thought ——

MOTHER WALTER—Yes. It seemed innocent enough—a diversion reviving an old accomplishment. But I have reason to believe that she is thinking of going on the stage professionally.

McARTHUR—The stage?—The Associated Charities?

MOTHER WALTER—You are puzzled. That's what makes clear to me the real trouble—inadequate support. Besides—if Richard pays heavily for his family, it's human—at least masculine, to want to enjoy it.

McARTHUR—You came opportunely—I have just received a letter from your son, allowing for an increase——

MOTHER WALTER (*Startled*)—If he thought of Laura—himself—he's up to mischief—conscience money.

McARTHUR—I'm sorry, but it's confidential. Still, you might as well see what's in the newspaper.

MOTHER WALTER—Scandal! In what paper?

McARTHUR—Edith has gone for it. At all events we must keep it from Mrs. Walter for to-day.

MOTHER WALTER—Yes. We've got to protect the wilful child against herself.

SCENE 10

(*Edith re-entering, hears the last speech.*)

EDITH—I beg your pardon, but does not Laura deserve to be treated as an adult?

MOTHER WALTER—My years don't protect me from unsolicited advice?

EDITH—Laura is my friend.

MOTHER WALTER—A spinster can't be expected to have very convincing ideas about marriage.

EDITH—Arthur and I are married.

MOTHER WALTER (*Amazed*)—When? How? By what minister?

EDITH—None.

MOTHER WALTER—Then you're not really married! Do you want to bring additional disgrace on the house? Mr. McArthur—he understands the proprieties—you'll have to be married. Benedict Gregg will do it. Marriage is a Sacrament—its root is religion—its end, offspring properly reared. When a woman marries, she is no longer her own mistress. If she won't of her own accord respect the ties and duties, her elders must prevail upon her——

EDITH—Cast your eyes on this item—Religious ties bind so much closer than a common-sense business partnership! (*Hands Mother Walter the newspaper as Laura enters.*)

LAURA (*With forced gayety*)—Well! Well! No luncheon? Saving up for dinner? No holiday at the office?

MOTHER WALTER (*Talking to herself*)—This is dreadful!

LAURA (*Looking about*)—For once we agree.

MOTHER WALTER (*To McArthur, handing him the paper so as not to attract Laura's attention to it*) This makes it only more imperative.

LAURA—What scheme have you for me?

MOTHER WALTER—Only good news, daughter. Mr. McArthur and Edith are going to ask Mr. Gregg to perform the ceremony—they're going to be really married! (*Darting a look of imperious rebuke at Edith*) So you can celebrate their engagement to-day.

LAURA (*To Edith*)—Married? You? (*To McArthur*) You two! (*Edith avoids her look.*)

McARTHUR—Your mother is practically correct—only in error as to Mr. Gregg.

MOTHER WALTER—Of course if they prefer a n o t h e r Minister—Mr. McArthur, may I have a word more with you? You might

see me home. Edith will manage to lend you for that short time to an old lady. (*Exeunt Mother Walter and McArthur.*)

SCENE 12

LAURA—You know what marriage has meant for me; all the shame, the bitterness?

EDITH—We expect less than you did.

LAURA—And will be discreeter than Richard and I were?

EDITH—We start with more experience.

LAURA—Of the man?

EDITH (*Coldly*)—To be sure, he was irregular before he entered this office.

LAURA—And was prepared for domesticity by art?

EDITH—Richard has genius; Arthur only talent. There's the difference. Besides —

LAURA—He has sowed his wild oats; and have you?

EDITH—I hope there's the moral superiority of the woman in my favor.

LAURA—I'm not so sure—of course we don't commit men's sins, but how about women's—just as damning in their petty way to all joy. After you have seen what I have done——

EDITH—You haven't done anything.

LAURA—Exactly. Sins of omission—all the worse. I tell you, Edith, reconsider ere it be too late.

EDITH—I think Mother Walter's desire to rebuke us for our objection to an old-fashioned wedding has misled you. So far as Arthur and I are ever to be married, we are already. We wanted no expense—no show—no cant; so we went to the Mayor's office.

LAURA—You are married? I thought I was protesting against what might be prevented. In your case, then, there's no "For better, for worse"—no "Until death do us part" and no "Obey." Ha! Ha! You don't swear and profess to, and so—men being what they are—and women, too, you may have yet to do it.

EDITH—At least we take no mythical eternity into reckoning. We don't erect into a virtue the subjection of one of the contracting parties.

LAURA—And that is progress? If, instead of cutting out what you call cant phrases, you made them divine Fiats? Oh, it's just there I erred. Only an impossible Ideal will serve to yoke our stubborn spirits to the burdens of life. Only eternity in view will keep us decent for the relations of time.

EDITH—You may be right, but ours is no skyscraper marriage, it's a plain bungalow on the level. When we feel we need it, we may add a religious top story. And we propose to do our duty. We will live with you, and help you bear your trials.

LAURA—I'm afraid from now on, it is I shall be staying in your house.

EDITH—You think Arthur and I are untrue, and would take advantage to supplant you?

LAURA—God forbid! Only it behooves us old friends to be candid. You have had to make your own way—get the training as clerk—stenographer—secretary—kindergartner. And, well, you kindly order my household for me. Now it's the free woman, Sarah, in spite of herself, who is to drive out Hagar, the bond-woman—the incompetent decorative supernumerary. You were the business woman—became to all intents mother to my children. Now you are wife. In law you are in my house. In fact I am in yours. What am I? A girl, given all sorts of futile accomplishments—I become a wife. Maternity is not an economic function. Indeed, it brings dependence—barely tolerable with love, and which usually undermines love. Now, I am no wife any more, and no mother. I have no trade, no profession. Were the truth told harshly I am a dependent, a parasite. The competitive system requires that every one earn his support, remain an infant, or lapse into the parasite. A parasite can have no friend.

EDITH—Oh, it is not so bad as that. I am not changed.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

LAURA—You are not perhaps, though everything between us is. You cannot be my friend as before. You are sorry for me, of course, but you don't respect me. I must stop playing at mother, philanthropist, at daubing, at dancing. Some one thing I must do—if I am to be anything.

EDITH—Countless women don't.

LAURA—Of course, had I large, unearned means of my own, it wouldn't appear necessary that I should do anything to be anything. I might deceive myself into thinking myself something. Then of course you would have respect for me, though I should, probably, deserve less even than now.

EDITH—You are too bitter, Laura.

LAURA—Can I help it? I keep my anniversary—for the children's sake—in a forlorn, unavowed hope—foolishly—that it will bring him back. You deny me your confidence, and marry without a word—in indecent haste.

EDITH—Special reasons——

LAURA—Oh, of course. Marion's, who knows, to stop talk?—save a jeopardized reputation? Anyway, there's one bright aspect. We'll change the affair to-night from pathetic reminiscence—to a joyful forward-looking celebration. You are competent and may yet be happy, as you deserve to be. I had hoped—Oh, God knows what—I am incompetent still, wretched, utterly miserable.

SCENE 13

(*Enter McArthur.*)

LAURA—Let me congratulate you. The choice you have made does your judgment credit. Now for the honeymoon.

MCARTHUR—Edith does not approve of any.

LAURA—Ah, yes. Your whole life a continuous one is much better. (*With forced gayety*) How you have supplied a reason for my eccentric celebration! Now we have cause for rejoicing. (*Exit Laura.*)

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 14

EDITH—I'm afraid our best intentions are thwarted.

McARTHUR—Laura takes it strangely.

EDITH—I almost believe she felt all along that you were hers !

McARTHUR—As I thought you were.

EDITH—We scheme with our heads all sorts of heroic benevolence, but deep in our hearts lurk selfish motives that actuate us unawares.

McARTHUR—Now you are scarcely doing yourself justice.

EDITH—Have you ever really loved Laura ?

McARTHUR—I may have cherished absurd romantic dreams, got from the poets, I fancy, and worked up to order in youth—involving far-off violet eternities—vague silvery moonshine ideals and roseate starshot auroras.

EDITH—I am ashamed to confess my folly, but I want you to care for me in that way too.

McARTHUR—Such sentiments, I fear, could not endure the test of life together.

EDITH—Oh, don't plead foresight and adult judgment. I'm not she, I know ! Only a remote figment of mists and refracted light—or an impractical, spoiled child—paradoxical and therefore incomprehensible, whom you drape at will with fancies and—enhalo, only such an one can be so loved by you belated men.

McARTHUR (*Chuckling*)—Such translunary passions I thought were survivals—ruled out forever from our world of mutual respect, fair play, regard for each other's spiritual rights of initiative and privacy ?

EDITH—Nonsense.

McARTHUR—Common sense.

EDITH—I'm furious with myself. For all our theories and good resolutions we can't escape human nature.

McARTHUR—Naturally.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

EDITH—And it's quite clear to me now that two households cannot live under one roof.

MCARTHUR—If we find we cannot, then we will not.

EDITH—I have an uneasy feeling that all we've done to help Laura will only make matters worse.

MCARTHUR—Because at the bottom—who knows—she had nothing to do with what we did.

EDITH—Ah, Arthur, I'm ashamed of it, but I would like to think so.

MCARTHUR—At all events, Laura is keyed up to high feeling—she has to adjust herself to altered relations. Let us keep this news from her for to-day—the shame of its irony.

SCENE 15

(Enter servant and Dick.)

DICK—Dinner is going to be served here. Heigho—aren't we sly? It's uncle Arthur now. Played hooky this morning, both of you, just to make trouble for yourselves.

EDITH—Arthur, we have our elaborate toilets to make.

MCARTHUR—We ought, I suppose, to clear up the office for the festivities.

DICK—Oh, no. Just let the screen hug—dear me, that's vulgar—*(Moves it with antic grimaces)* no, embrace at proper distance the paraphernalia. Useful husband *(screen)* shuts out angry world from superior spouse: *(Pointing to the typewriter)* useful little thing, never out of sorts—clicking night and day for dear life.

EDITH—You foolish boy.

DICK *(Full of boisterous fun)*—You just ought to have seen the fun—before lunch. Frederika playing husband—Evelyn, wife—Cedric, child—beautiful tableau! See here, you may need an object lesson. Evelyn—wife—paid too much attention to child, Cedric; husband—Frederika—bored—jealous—had a right to be sole center of wifely interest—So pummelled wife, Evelyn,

who made Sunday supplement faces and went off into hysterics. Child, Cedric, whooped for joy.

EDITH—Where did you learn such barbarous ideas of the family?

DICK—Don't have to learn. You see it's this way: wives need to be kept in subjection, or husbands are slaves. On the whole, it's best to keep up the man's courage for his daily struggle with the world. Beating the wife keeps him in training and imparts self-confidence. So a good wife ought to enjoy her mission.

MCARTHUR—There's progressive doctrine for you!

EDITH—You're a savage.

DICK—If everything were always shipshape, Auntie, you'd have to blow up the old hull for diversion, if she were the ark with all the animals in it.

EDITH—And to let the influence of the parents mould the ideas of the children—Poor Laura!

MCARTHUR—Mistaken self-sacrifices!

DICK—None of them for me. Turn the boys loose, and the girls too, and they'll whack each other into fine form.

EDITH—You must go, Arthur, and get ready.

DICK—At last, education, sadly neglected, begins!

MCARTHUR—I'll have to take a hand yet in yours, you young rascal.

DICK—Wish you luck, Uncle, the more the merrier.

(Exeunt Edith and McArthur.)

SCENE 16

(Enter Mother Walter. Looks about to see if they are alone.)

MOTHER WALTER—Do you know the awful news, Dick?

DICK—Mother must not.

MOTHER WALTER—She must be prepared.

DICK—For lies?

MOTHER WALTER—What makes you think ——?

DICK—Think! I know Father.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

MOTHER WALTER (*Sighs*)—I wish I could believe in him as you do.

DICK—You don't understand real men anyhow, Grandmother. They've got to be good, eh? Well, sense and pluck will do for me. History's all about men who smashed laws and kept things humming.

MOTHER WALTER—You're a heathen.

DICK (*Hums derisively*)—"O mother dear, Jerusalem!"

MOTHER WALTER—If Mr. Gregg should hear you.

DICK—He wouldn't mind. He knows I'm right, though he's got to make out lady-like manners are the whole duty of man. That's his job.

MOTHER WALTER—You're just trying to shock your poor grandmother. You don't mean it.

DICK—What I do mean is, I'd rather be Father than any man alive.

SCENE 17

(*Enter Laura dressed for dinner. Starts to count seats, arranges cards at places. Vacant chair of Walter. Decorates in his taste with boughs. Evidence of the cult of Walter in the two pictures by the organ.*)

MOTHER WALTER—You carry the whimsical notion pretty far—decorating the pictures of bride and groom.

LAURA—Your son doesn't cease to be the father of our children.

MOTHER WALTER—Nor you, I suppose, his wife, though you deserted him in his hour of temptation.

LAURA—I almost fear there is truth in your cruel way of putting the matter. But my faith remains unshaken.

DICK—That's right, Mother, I'm with you in that.

MOTHER WALTER (*Looks at her, puzzled*)—Suppose he should never return? that he met—that he met his ideal? Could you forgive him still?

LAURA—Forgive? Yes ——

MOTHER WALTER—Only the secretly guilty forgive.

LAURA—Suppose I admit that too? There are divers sorts of spiritual unfaithfulness in a wife of which she may be guilty unawares.

MOTHER WALTER—But I—I opened his eyes, you may be sure, and he has punished you in letting you depend on McArthur.

LAURA—What do you mean?

MOTHER WALTER—I tried to obtain an increase of your allowance to stop your restless looking for a career.

LAURA—And you found?

MOTHER WALTER (*Ironically*)—That he has been thoughtful to foresee your need of increased income.

LAURA—You mean that my support doesn't come from Richard at all?

MOTHER WALTER—Partly. I infer it.

LAURA—And your motive, pray, in imparting your suspicions?

MOTHER WALTER—To prepare you for the worst.

DICK—If you try to break Mother's spirit, Grandmother, I wish you luck. She's got fighting blood, and I'll bet on Mother.

MOTHER WALTER—I'm challenging her courage to meet the future on principle, not on blind faith and sentiment.

SCENE 18

(*Enter McArthur.*)

DICK—Hurrah for Uncle Arthur!

LAURA—Mr. McArthur, I have just heard that Richard Walter's provision for his family amounts—to shifting his responsibilities on to your broad shoulders.

MCARTHUR—Hardly; the house is yours, the business is yours. I have bought a third interest, which I claim. I see no impropriety in paying to his family what I owe to my friend and teacher.

LAURA—I am no business woman, but I fear you have kept me unduly in ignorance. I cannot, you know, be your ward.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

McARTHUR—Surely I can be your trusted agent. My marriage ——

LAURA—Makes any draft on your time and strength unjust.

MOTHER WALTER—Again your pride, Laura. I wanted to prepare you for contingencies, not to precipitate trouble.

LAURA—It is too late now, Mother Walter. You have aroused me. I am grateful for your help. Being awake, and aware, I must obey my own sense of right.

SCENE 19

(*Enter Edith.*)

McARTHUR (*To Edith*)—Laura misunderstands our relations entirely. She thinks we are guilty of putting her in a humiliating situation.

EDITH—I claim, dear Laura, the right for my husband and myself to discharge in full, with interest, all we owe Mr. Walter.

LAURA—To his family, not to his ex-wife.

McARTHUR—We are all one household. We cannot discriminate.

LAURA—What might be handsome in you, would be pitiful in me.

EDITH—Since the question has come up so unfortunately—let me state that for friendship's sake we can no longer impose upon you.

LAURA—What I said of Hagar?

EDITH—We have no right to rob you any longer of your solace and sense of dignity in the present unhappy situation.

MOTHER WALTER—There you are right.

LAURA—Grandmother, it is from now on not a matter of your conscience, but mine. (*Marion and Gregg enter*) I shall answer Edith at the proper time. (*Laura moves the place-card away from seat left of vacant seat.*)

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 20

LAURA—Ah, it is good of you to come, Benedict.

GREGG—Marion excused me from attendance at a tedious parochial function.

LAURA (*To Marion*)—That was very thoughtful of you.

MARION (*To Edith*)—Of course, I hardly know whether I can congratulate you yet.

GREGG—My dear Mr. and Mrs. McArthur—

MARION (*To Gregg*)—Will you acknowledge a civil marriage?

GREGG—My dear, it is unfortunate that they do not see things as we do—that their relation is a sacrament—that in times of stress, dignity and self-control can by ordinary mortals be compassed only on condition of an acknowledged supernatural bond.

EDITH—We have made no professions, envisage no transcendental mysteries. We are equal partners.

GREGG—An excellent foundation to build on.

LAURA—I fear me, you will find it sink under the superstructure. I tell you, marriage is mockery or it is a spiritual relation, higher, deeper, larger than fancy, liking, convenience, passion; a call to heroism, to devotion—each schooling himself to make the actual life continuously suggest the unseen progress together of souls—and to qualify for the satisfaction of new mutual needs.

MOTHER WALTER—Now you are uttering the very oracles of God.

LAURA—I have preached them my homily—I, that should not. I also congratulate my two friends, Arthur and Edith, that they will not commit sacrilege by cowardly conformity with usages, the significance of which they fail yet to recognize.

SCENE 21

(*Enter the children in perfect order.*)

MARION—Ah, what luscious place cards!

LAURA—My last daubs.

MARION—Think of burying such a talent!

Vacant	Gregg	Mother	F.	C.
A. McA.				Edith McA.
Laura	Dick	Marion	E.	

GREGG—Exquisite decorations.

LAURA—So far as possible in Richard's taste.

MARION—And see! Richard's vacant chair! How deliciously sentimental. Does you honor, darling, though I couldn't do it.

MOTHER WALTER (*Caustically*)—You would fill it no doubt speedily with the first newcomer?

LAURA—Oh, Mother! Now friends, you may observe our new bridegroom is at the head of the table and our bride at the foot, her foster daughters at her right and left hands, Marion and Grandmother to fend them respectively from harm. I am the guest of honor and Dick is my cavalier. The unexpected clerical guest is appointed guardian of Grandmother's conscience. (*All sit down.*)

MARION—A most ingenious arrangement. (*Mother Walter urges Gregg to speak.*)

GREGG (*Rises and clears his throat*)—As official keeper of the conscience of Mrs. Walter, senior, I am at her suggestion emboldened to take upon myself the office of master of ceremonies on this festive occasion. At banquets, first the culinary masterpieces, then the remnants of wit and oratory. I propose the reversal of the vulgar order. Let speeches and courses alternate—layer upon layer—the fat and the lean. Let us open then with hearty good wishes that our guest of honor—self-appointed, although as hostess providing the repast—may rejoice in many and ever happier returns of this day so rightly sacred—and that its present celebration prove an omen of the devoutly to be wished reunion of the parted family. (*Sits down.*)

MOTHER WALTER—That is a fine speech, Laura, and should be taken in the spirit in which it is conceived and delivered on behalf of us all, and I should like to add—(*With comic shyness*)—although I cannot make congratulatory addresses with becoming fluency, having entered club life too late (*Adjusts her spectacles and faces Edith*), that however seriously opinions may sunder us, we do notwithstanding, before the first course, most earnestly desire that our friends now civilly married—who repudiate Holy Matrimony—shall, in spite of their correctness from the world's point of view, and we trust the entire propriety and felicity of their ways, come to recognize, ere it be too late, the error of their notion.

EDITH—I'm afraid that if all goes well with us—as you pray—we won't learn much.

MARION—Oh, you're bound to learn a lot anyhow. I can tell you, once a woman's married her education begins.

MCARTHUR—That is—the man's elimination?

EDITH—Oh, Arthur, you're so tactless!

MCARTHUR (*Chuckling*)—Didn't I say so?

SCENE 22

(*Servant comes in and announces Mr. Lightfoot.*)

LAURA—Show him in, pray.

MOTHER WALTER—You can't mean to have him at this meal?

LAURA—You have, I believe, yourself made him part of the family—taking him into your confidence. He should be one of my witnesses to-night, when you are all gathered together to pass judgment upon me.

MARION—Judgment?

LAURA—Judgment!

MOTHER WALTER—I will surrender my seat before you let him occupy Richard's.

MARION (*To Mother Walter*)—You see, she will fill it with the newcomer!

(*Enter Dancing Master.*)

MR. LIGHTFOOT—I must apologize for being so late.

LAURA—It is we must beg to be excused for sitting down before your arrival. I feared you might be delayed as you intimated.

MR. LIGHTFOOT—But you fill me with confusion. A decorated chair for me! Too much honor is done an humble professor of an art long since extinct.

GREGG—I much fear I must spoil a flattering illusion. Had not I come, after excusing myself, you would not have been thus embarrassed.

LAURA—I begged you, Mr. Lightfoot, to come for the express purpose of repeating to my family what you said this morning to me. But since then things have occurred, and words have been spoken that ripened my decision irrespective of any opinions my family and my intimate friends may cherish.

MR. LIGHTFOOT—The desire of my life fulfilled? It is then to be? Ah, I am very selfish. I dare not take the responsibility.

MOTHER WALTER—What responsibility?

LAURA (*To Mr. Lightfoot*)—Do you repent then of your offer?

MR. LIGHTFOOT—Ah, no. Not that.

LAURA—Then I beg you to understand that all the responsibility is mine. I, of my own free will, take this step.

MOTHER WALTER—What's all this about?

LAURA (*Rises*)—Oh, don't be alarmed, Mother Walter. It is only a matter of a good resolution. From now on, Edith, I cease to be a mere economic dependent, and, Grandmother, an amateur mother.

MOTHER WALTER—Excellent! At last you recognize your vocation!

LAURA—I cease from now on, Dick dear, to be an indifferent philanthropist and sociologist; and a make-believe artist, Mr. McArthur. This much I owe you all, and in chief to him whose seat was vacant to-night largely, I confess, by my fault. He has always at least been true to his vision. Whatever punishment has come to me, I can therefore endure. (*Sits down.*)

GREGG—A good resolution is a happy omen. I congratulate you, Laura.

MOTHER WALTER—For once she acts from rational principle, and not from impulse, passion and pride.

(Servant enters.)

SERVANT—"A word for Mr. Lightfoot." *(Hands him a scrawled note.)*

MR. LIGHTFOOT *(As soon as he sees it, takes letter out of his pocket)*—I was almost going to forget. At the door a young man handed me this letter for you, Mrs. Walter, which he begged me to promise I would deliver into your own hands.

MOTHER WALTER—One of her worthless chronic cases?

MR. LIGHTFOOT—He was well attired, and not in the least obsequious.

MARION—A book agent, I wager, selling a set of classics for wedding anniversaries.

DICK—Don't open the letter, Mother, it's a piece of impertinence to force upon you in this fashion his communication, whatever its purport.

LAURA—Have you an idea what it is? *(Tearing it open.)*

DICK—I have, and I object.

LAURA—Well, my dear boy, you heard what I resolved? I can't have you protect me from annoyances. I must fight my own fights. *(Laura is greatly perturbed as she reads, but exercises self-control)* Is the young man waiting for an answer?

SERVANT—He is, madam.

MR. LIGHTFOOT—I fear I have been an unconscious bearer of evil tidings.

LAURA *(To the maid)*—Tell the reporter that I have no comment to make for the press.

MARION—Give us all the benefit of the billet doux.

LAURA—Only a piece of news that concerns me personally. *(Laura rises, pushing back her chair)* I CAN NO LONGER EAT THE BREAD OF THE MAN WHO WAS MY HUSBAND.

MOTHER WALTER (*Alarmed*)—Let the children be dismissed.

LAURA—No, this evening I am still mistress here. They shall stay to hear from me, not from you or from malicious busybodies, what concerns their mother.

MCARTHUR—It is only after all a miserable newspaper story.

LAURA—Have you better information?

MCARTHUR—I had a letter to-day ——

LAURA—Then let me see it!

MCARTHUR—It was confidential.

LAURA—Does it contradict the rumor?

MCARTHUR—Take my word, it denies the truth of the reports.

LAURA—Anticipating, of course, their publication?

MCARTHUR—And begging me to protect you.

LAURA—Yes, I see. All day I felt I was a child kept in seemly ignorance of my own affairs. I am strong enough to face the truth. Does he deny in spirit as well as fact—as to marriage?

MCARTHUR—If you press me, he affirms his right to do as he shall see fit.

LAURA—At the expiration of the term? Then the newspapers are merely premature. (*To Lightfoot*) I accept your generous offer, on condition—I may repay you whatever I shall have cost you to launch. (*To the family*) He chooses to consider me as a speculation—I grant him the right to do so.

MOTHER WALTER—The villain! Think of the scandal for the children.

LAURA (*Bitterly*)—You can invent excuses.

GREGG (*Rising with solemn authority*)—Here is your duty—with your children—whatever Richard may do.

LAURA—I can stay here only as his hireling—the governess to his children. On a business basis, the only one I can in self-respect allow, I should be dismissed for incompetency. So then I, in his stead, dismiss myself. Let Edith, who renders the service, enjoy the reward. I must make a career for myself.

MOTHER WALTER—But the scandal?

LAURA (*Scornfully*)—A stage name will protect you. Treat me as one dead or gone on a long journey, and nobody out of this present company will know what I have done.

MOTHER WALTER—I cannot stay to countenance this.

LAURA—Stay, for the children will need you. Edith's marriage has settled everything for them. She who manages, fosters and directs, is the real mother of the human beings. Let Edith be acknowledged for what she is—I cede all my rights to her—and when I am in a position to repay —

EDITH—Never. Hitherto I have pitied you, now I respect you. But I insist that you also respect me. You can't be your husband's hireling—I'm not the hireling of my friend. I beg leave to give my services.

GREGG—But, Laura, God has given the children to you.

LAURA—The unconscious infants were mine, and He withheld the talent for their education.

GREGG—Let at least the children speak for themselves.

LAURA—Very well. I accept Dick as their spokesman. I will, if you choose, abide by his decision.

MOTHER WALTER—Dick, save your mother from this folly!

GREGG—Think of your little brother and your sisters!

DICK—I'll think of Mother first. Father did wrong, but he's a great artist—that's better than coddling a fellow. Mother, do what you think right for yourself. Be a great woman. I'd rather have that—beautiful, free, equal to Father.

LAURA—Won't you miss me?

DICK—Yes, but I'll think of you, if I don't see you. I don't blame you for not wanting to stay in this house. I'd go to work myself, except that I need an education to be up to Father and you some day—and see if I don't repay dollar for dollar. Since Father left, I have been keeping account. And you needn't worry about things, Auntie Edith can do better for us.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

MOTHER WALTER—If Laura is as mad as this, the children are better off without her. Edith and I will do her duty by them.

LAURA—Thank you, Mother Walter. I needed to hear just that from you, to give me the fullest satisfaction in the step I take. (*Comes back down steps*) And don't suppose I leave out of anger against Richard. He is beautiful, whatever he does and appears to be; or how could he have done things that stay beautiful from year to year? I shall make myself worthy of the marriage that did not take place—now—never can—but which should and might have been ours—a comradeship for highest development of courage, strength, service, aspiration by becoming truly myself, living as he for my work—my art; and I shall be dead to his children, till I have a right to live and claim them as mine. (*Dick starts to embrace his mother*) No, Dick, let's shake hands like comrades. Keep account strictly and—we will both buy our freedom. Mr. Lightfoot, your arm. Good-by.

GREGG—You will repent.

LAURA—God knows.

MARION—Don't worry, it's only a freak. She'll return.

LAURA—When I have become mistress of my own soul.

CEDRIC—Sha'n't we have the "Find-out Club" all the time now?

EVELYN—I needn't keep going over to my grandmother!

FREDERIKA—You little fools, shut up. Good-by, Mother, you're great. You'll succeed. (*Laura, overcome with emotion, exit precipitately.*)

(*Curtain*)

ACT IV

MEETING THEIR DEEPER SELVES

ACT IV

SCENE 1 .

Estate on Berkley hills. In front a meadow full of escholtzias. In rear of stage a slight ridge or knoll, the site for the proposed great palace of Helen, overlooking the bay, and looking to the ocean through the Golden Gate. The sky line of Tamalpais to the right over the ridge: indications of the lights of the city to the left. On the right of the stage a eucalyptus grove, and a belated golden acacia in bloom. To the left, one or two eucalyptus trees, and dense evergreen shrubbery, behind which is concealed the improvised stage on which Laura is to dance. In the fore, to the right, is a diminutive Japanese garden, with toy tea-house, gold-fish pond, of all of which Blake is very proud. Had it made himself! Curtain rises on Blake, McArthur and Edith, talking.

BLAKE—Yonder are the city lights—all up those hills they climb to the twin peaks, an ideal couple—wife a little shorter than husband—see? It's a wonderful city, isn't it? has New York, I tell you, beaten outright. Just give it a little time.

MCARTHUR—These eucalyptus groves are strangely picturesque.

BLAKE—I suppose to Eastern eyes the ragged ugly things look interesting. But they are no good for lumber—those crazy blue gums make windbreaks against trades—that's all.

EDITH—Will we see the dancer on the dark stage?

BLAKE—My stepdaughter, eh? (*Laughs to himself.*)

EDITH—Your daughter?

BLAKE (*Gaily*)—Oh, no blood kin of mine—not within the forbidden degrees anyway.

EDITH—By marriage?

BLAKE (*Going up to stage*)—That's just one of my litle jokes I'll have to explain later. We've reckoned on the moon—a string of electric lights—the switchboard's here (*Turns on lights*) and the musicians sit back there up to their eyes in the scrub. (*Turns on lights at their seats.*)

McARTHUR—And over there is the site?

BLAKE—Right you are! There goes the million dollar shack the very day Miss Helen Darneill gets to be reasonable. And I tell you, that mutual friend of ours—Walter—has the plans. A tiptop Alhambra will soon peer out to the sea, like a golden snail sticking up its horns in front of its shell at the city that has New York beaten.

EDITH—Backed by a eucalyptus grove—in full view of the sleeping Indian Bride by the Golden Gate, Mt. Tamalpais.

BLAKE—Name correct—you are a wonder—to get your bearings so quickly.

EDITH—Baedeker is good in a foreign country. And I understand you are willing to tolerate the rest of the U. S. A. as a mere convenient political appendage to the Golden State?

BLAKE—O we don't exactly say that, but you've got the native sons diagnosed. The big trees and the Pacific Ocean, and the Sierras—they will mount to a fellow's head, you know. Now you must come and take tea at the tea-house in the Japanese garden. (*Helps Edith over a steep arched bamboo bridge on to an island of rockeries covered with ferns and rank blossoming growths.*)

EDITH—What goldfish!

McARTHUR—And this little waterfall keeps up its chatter so you don't have to talk.

BLAKE—Oh, I'm no misogynist myself, but the Japs have got their women folk in training. (*Seats Edith in miniature tea-house*) Only thing they really beat us on.

EDITH—You are not very gallant. (*Japanese woman brings tea.*)

BLAKE—Guess it's not entirely due to the men—the horrid little dolls are grateful to be treated as useful domestic animals, they're so unattractive. (*McArthur and Edith look nervously at Japanese woman.*)

BLAKE (*Laughs*)—Oh, don't worry about my remarks. She's unspoiled yet! Can't understand a word we say.

EDITH—Seriously, you are not so old-fashioned?

BLAKE—Well, just fancy a maid of Nippon making a likely suitor for her hand keep an offer of a million dollar house open three long years.

EDITH—Miss Darneill has a right estimate of her value.

BLAKE—That she has. Don't know a thing yet, but it's got to come to a head. That's why I engaged this artiste to dance for us—Richard Walter on the spot to agree to the building, and you, his friends, to witness the bargain. By the way, I hear Mrs. Walter has left home?

MCARTHUR—Unfortunately, she went on to New York, assumed a stage name, and never revealed it to us, because we naturally opposed her step. We have felt honor bound to respect her jealous privacy.

BLAKE—Residence, P. O. Box No. X. Y. Z.

MCARTHUR—Just so.

BLAKE—Hard on the orphans.

EDITH—We take care of them.

BLAKE—So their guardians came all the way out here to make their father settle up for their benefit?

MCARTHUR—Walter is very willing.

BLAKE—Oh, of course. Wouldn't look well when you're held up in such a cause. Make him put up a lot. He makes money hand over fist, and I'll lend him all he wants. Besides, if he takes this contract, his commission will be a whole pile. Dig the filthy lucre out of him. I'll let you have a pickaxe and a stick or two of dynamite on credit.

EDITH (*Changing the subject*)—I suppose Miss Adeline Alden is very beautiful. (*Laughing.*)

BLAKE—Are you on to me? Well I haven't seen her—but you see when I was called upon to form a syndicate to launch a young woman of great talent who danced to music—well, I saw my chance. I agreed on condition that she'd dance first on the coast privately for my friends, and to some music Walter adores.

So she's the daughter of my cash, you see, and my cash is, up to date, my better half. That's the way I make out the relation. (*Laughs loudly*) You'll excuse me, won't you? I'm afraid one of these confounded electricians or musicians, worse luck, won't be on to his job and then——

SCENE 2

EDITH—I have a strange suspicion.

MCARTHUR—That our host is only in part Walter's friend?

EDITH—That's evident. He's jealous of him.

MCARTHUR—Because he wants to interest Walter in this dancer that he's launching—perhaps on purpose?

EDITH—That's all self-evident, Arthur—but don't you have a presentiment?

MCARTHUR—Never knew you to indulge in such psychic research phenomena.

EDITH—That shows how well you know me by this!

MCARTHUR—Well, what's your unaccountable misgiving?

EDITH—Well, if this Miss Alden were Laura——?

MCARTHUR—Bah! I saw her picture in the newspaper. (*Takes it out of overcoat pocket and shows it to Edith.*)

EDITH—Some likeness.

MCARTHUR—Not much. And she couldn't have got to the top in a year.

EDITH—Oh, you can't say!

MCARTHUR—And how could she have a syndicate to back her, without any business sense?

EDITH—Talent would suffice.

MCARTHUR—It's very unlikely.

EDITH—But miracles always happen.

MCARTHUR—Like our marriage, eh?

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 3

(Re-enter Blake, introducing Patterson, a tall, languid, eager-eyed youth, with large gesticulatory hands; his favorite attitude, leaning forward from the hips, face downward and hands spread over his abdomen, with fixed, absent gaze.)

BLAKE—Mr. William Foster Patterson, I want to introduce you to my Eastern friends, Mrs. McArthur—Mr. McArthur.

PATTERSON—It is a rare privilege.

BLAKE—He's the tail to the comet—writes her up in erudite style and blazons her coming and corruscates her going—to use his dialect.

PATTERSON—You make me blush for my modest talents.

BLAKE—I tell you he can lilt you the praise of the Golden Gate and acclimatize you anesthetically. Look out or you will exfoliate palmwise under his hypnotic gaze.

PATTERSON—You make fun of me.

BLAKE—Dear me, no. At that Hamadryad show of yours, didn't your passes develop umbelliferous florets all over the natural man of me? I'm off to inspect the properties while you look after my guests.

SCENE 4

EDITH *(To make talk)*—You're a native son?

PATTERSON—Hardly so fortunate.

MCARTHUR—From the East, then?

PATTERSON—Yes, from under the classic shades of Reno, Nevada!

EDITH *(Laughing)*—To have missed the distinction by so little!

PATTERSON—Not to have been irradiated at birth by yonder scintillant nimbus about the bay, that obfuscates caliginously the Neapolitan! Have my orders, you see! In sight of that Indian Brunhilda that is kissed asleep every night by a blood-red Sigurd.

EDITH—You needn't fill out our host's burlesque description of you. You have become enamored of the coast?

PATTERSON—Who wouldn't? Just you climb Diablo—Spanish for Devil.

McARTHUR—On muleback?

PATTERSON—And gaze at the panorama of old rose, voluptuous hills, leopard-spotted with black live oaks and what they call huckleberry trees—or see them in May, so green that lettuce looks brown beside them, and watch the grey lines of eucalyptus charging to the summit—one or two of them ahead of their fellows waving ragged banners from the crested sky line—and then the mystical groves of redwood.

EDITH—Enough to turn a cobbler into a poet!

McARTHUR—And you turned of course?

PATTERSON (*With offended vanity after a silence*)—I didn't, I was born a poet!

McARTHUR—Ah, I congratulate you!

EDITH—And your theme—the Coast.

PATTERSON—Allegories. I made the last grove play for the Bohemian high jinks.

McARTHUR—And that is?

PATTERSON—Oh, I'm sorry, you haven't of course been initiated yet—but Blake bought his way in California—extraordinary luck—no taste—but a generous patron. I'm one of those who steer him by the shoals.

EDITH—Must be lucrative business.

McARTHUR—And you, of course, brought this Miss —— to his attention?

PATTERSON—I had the honor.

McARTHUR—You know where she comes from?

PATTERSON—No more than the papers say.

McARTHUR—Unmarried?

BEYOND DISILLUSION

PATTERSON—I was never sufficiently impertinent to inquire. Manners aren't obsequious out here, sir.

EDITH—Unless you want to win a woman.

PATTERSON—Hardly.

MCARTHUR—Or extract money from a god of finance.

PATTERSON—Never.

SCENE 5

(Enter Blake, rubbing his hands.)

BLAKE—Ho! my boy Pat—Patrick, son of Patter, I'll teach you a brand new trick.

PATTERSON *(Respectfully)*—And that, my dear sir? *(McArthur and Edith exchange amused glances at Pat's change of manner.)*

BLAKE—A new way to win a woman, and I'll tell you, you'll need all the tricks in creation to bag your "Adeline." She's a witch.

Writing her up in flamboyant style isn't going to work.

PATTERSON—And you leave her to tell me?

BLAKE—Banished from the sacred precincts. No males wanted!

EDITH—Might I go?

BLAKE—To the Green room roofed with sky? Oh, that's different. Nymph attendant on Diana! *(To Patterson)* You see, my friend, one retains scraps of mythology from your Hamadryads. *(Beckons to Japanese woman—makes himself understood by signs—Exit Edith with same.)*

SCENE 6

PATTERSON—Well, the new Hermes Trismegistos trick?

BLAKE *(Chuckling)*—Wait a bit.

PATTERSON—No, I'll pay cash down in advance with mine. *(Gets MS. out of pocket.)*

BLAKE *(With mock alarm)*—You sha'n't give my guest locomotor ataxia.

PATTERSON—With my cryptic incantations? But your guest just now expressed great curiosity.

McARTHUR—Not about your poem, sir.

PATTERSON—About its subject.

BLAKE—I tell you, man—I'd be delighted later when the ladies—

PATTERSON—And y o u can show off as the patron of the muses, eh?

BLAKE—They're natural connoisseurs.

PATTERSON—I need your opinions as gentlemen, as males.

BLAKE—H'm! Salacious? That's another matter. (*Settles with interest into seat and pulls McArthur into another.*)

PATTERSON—Not in the least. Only it takes brains, and women, I have it on authority, think with their complexions.

BLAKE—And we with our feet. (*Puts his up on another chair*)
Nothing for it, McArthur, our judicial intellects are appealed to: select, intelligent audience.

PATTERSON—First of all—I distinguish between a man and his soul.

BLAKE (*To McArthur*)—A woman and her—spirit; for Mahomet, who had a whole harem to judge from, decreed that they had no soul. Only celibates and mooncalves opine otherwise. Patterson verbiage!

PATTERSON—My poem is entitled: "Her Refusal." I imagine it spoken by the heroine who jilts her adorer because he only loves what he sees of her.

BLAKE (*Uproariously*)—Excellent, my lad! You should love the invisible, unspeakable, unmentionable!

PATTERSON (*Reads quickly for fear of missing his chance*)—

"Her Refusal"

Oh, lover, if thou love my soul
Deeper than twilight dream,
How canst thou more than pity dole
To her—woe's me—I seem?

BLAKE—Sanscrit!

PATTERSON—You can't understand at first, but wait——

BLAKE (*Breaks in*)—Isn't he superb? Doesn't allow a fellow to love what she seems, only what she doesn't seem. Recovered! Proceed. Can stand another stanza now.

PATTERSON (*Reads*)—

If to thine eye my spirit glow
Beyond the glimmer of dawn,
Should not thy heart the bliss foreknow
Of love through love foregone?

BLAKE—And that's the way you're going to win her? Instructing her how to refuse you?

PATTERSON—My rival, you mean.

BLAKE—Ha! Ha! as rich as a circus. You woo a woman's astral body, her spook, and that flatters her real body, so you win the astral and the rest thrown in!

PATTERSON—Give the poem a chance. Hear it through—only three more stanzas.

BLAKE—Mr. McArthur, you can stand it? Listen closely and don't snore. Nudge my elbow if I do. One! Two! Three! and go!

PATTERSON (*Reads*)—

Never, oh, never, may I Thee
Love, lover mine, for thou
To Her I am, dost bend the knee—
To her I disavow.

Could She I am not,—whom I yearn
With all my being to be,—
Meet Thee, that shall be—should I turn
Thus solitary from thee?

If plighted were They twain, and wed
Beyond the death of us,—
Then might even we know love—tho' dead,
A love not blasphemous.

BEYOND DISILLUSION

BLAKE (*Scratching his head*)—Devilishly difficult! Transcendental compound of Point Loma Mysticism, Theosophy, and Christian Science. The blend goes to the head. What do you think of it? (*To McArthur.*)

MCARTHUR—A trifle Browningsque and Meredithian!

PATTERSON—My masters.

BLAKE—Now, son of Patter, my turn. I'd let any jury of sane men decide if your way to domesticate a Hebe is up to mine. That ridge yonder, for site—a million dollar Alhambra on top—my open purse for your rivals, till they all have to retire gracefully and yield the prize; or look in her eyes like—well, get me a simile!

PATTERSON—But that's no new trick.

BLAKE—I've made up my mind not to tell you, till you're desperate about yours: Courting my lady's soul (She doesn't know—but you, lynx-eyed, know she has)—with the soul (you modestly don't know, but she, inspired, knows you have) until the psychological moment arrives—you swap knowledge, and whoop up in a chariot of fire, and the volcano performs, and the earth has a jag on, and the whole ocean roars up in smoke and swallows the sun, moon and stars!!

PATTERSON—Ha! Ha! Blake! Never laughed like this since the Hamadryad?

SCENE 7

(*Re-enters Edith, agitated, signifies to McArthur that the dancer is Laura.*)

MCARTHUR—Did you see her?

EDITH—Yes.

BLAKE—Venture to say she never deigned to look at you. Has eyes only for her manager—that's business—and for the trans-lunary press-agent-lover here!

EDITH—You are right—she didn't have time, for me.

BLAKE—Can anybody enter into competition with a poetic genius

who, when he looks at a woman, looks through her to the bird of paradise shaking its wings for a flight?

PATTERSON—Mocking my poem makes you poetical.

BLAKE—Dear me! A catching disease! Would you interfere with a man's standing? Poets, preachers and professors aren't altogether one's social equals out here —

PATTERSON (*Piqued*)—Aren't they in the Bohemian Club?

BLAKE (*Drolly*)—Honorary members to be sure; but the real members are the audience for the benefit of which the trained monkeys perform. What saves you—gives you caste—is you're a press agent for an artiste.

PATTERSON—Well—and that new trick of yours—to win a woman?

BLAKE—Thought better of it. Can't tell you yet. What would you suggest as the best method, Mrs. McArthur?

EDITH—Offer straightforward comradeship and partnership.

PATTERSON—Without the gallant garnitures of chivalry?

BLAKE—No fairy tale "happy ever after" nonsense, Mrs. McArthur?

EDITH—With "fair play" instead.

BLAKE—Humph! No woman's really modern, unless she has to be; just as nobody's poor for fun. Now my idea is—A woman wants two things—a business manager and a lover, and if she can telescope them into one person, she's got heaven on earth.

EDITH—Nothing like bachelors for theories.

BLAKE (*With good humor*)—Would you refuse them the theories, as well as the ladies?

SCENE 8

(*Enter Richard Walter and Helen.*)

BLAKE (*With gallantry*)—Ah, at last; The moon has risen!

PATTERSON—Followed by one star!

BLAKE (*Still gallant*)—The waters of my soul respond to your attraction, and glisten for joy at your coming—even in the company of my dangerous rival. You know his friends?

HELEN—I'm not certain I have the honor.

WALTER (*Introduces*)—Mrs. McArthur.

HELEN (*With stiff recognition*)—Your former stenographer.

WALTER—Mr. McArthur.

HELEN—You've often spoken of him—a sort of factotum of yours?

WALTER (*Irritated*)—My friend.

EDITH (*Angry*)—I think I remember you—the person who wanted a ready made palace built for a free woman. I see you have changed.

HELEN—My views only.

BLAKE—Mr. Patterson, I believe you know well—professor of scientifico-mystic courting—a new art. Please teach him your theory of the infallible method.

HELEN—There's none. So many women—so many ways.

BLAKE—Well, give us the best in your opinion. Walter wants to know it.

HELEN—Let me see. Not to be in love with the lady at all.

BLAKE—Or at least not to let the infection appear?

HELEN—Be absorbed in great plans.

BLAKE (*To Walter*)—Art!

WALTER (*To Blake*)—Morning Star laundry Syndicate!

HELEN—Let the man draw her into his gigantic dreams.

BLAKE (*To Walter*)—An Alhambra!

WALTER (*To Blake*)—The fortune it will cost!

HELEN—Make her desire to control the power that creates and controls and realizes the dreams.

WALTER—That's you, Blake.

BLAKE—Me? Eh? Bless my soul! The description tallies. I look like materialized dreams! (*Seats Helen*) Now I have an advantage for once over you, Walter! (*Leans over, giving instructions to invisible orchestra*) Just a few of the opening bars. (*To Helen*) Orchestra is properly hidden, mere musi-

cians you know. (*To musicians*) Stop, please, when I lift my hand. (*Walter rises furious. Blake lifts his hand. Music stops.*)

WALTER—Is that what this dancer is to illustrate?

BLAKE—Don't be huffy. It's well meant.

WALTER—My music needs interpreting with bare arms and legs in contortions?

BLAKE—You're just giving yourself away. When you publish a symphony anonymously, you can't have personal rights respected then, you dunderhead. You of course understand your score—but we don't. Sit down and watch us trying to interpret the cryptic symbolism.

HELEN—Mr. Blake couldn't have procured me a greater pleasure than by having your music interpreted for me.

WALTER (*Sharply*)—I remember Japanese prints had once to be translated into fiddle language, and now, music has to be transposed into new-fangled acrobatics.

PATTERSON (*Rises indignantly*)—You owe Miss Alden an apology.

BLAKE—Patterson, put cocaine on that exposed nerve! Our friend Walter hasn't the immeasurable bliss of tagging after your star all over the map, writing eulogies, prose and verse in her honor—so he can't rightly appreciate her scintillations in absentia.

HELEN—Entirely innocent of malign intentions.

PATTERSON (*Resigned*)—I am glad you answer for him or I'm afraid he'd have to answer to me.

BLAKE—Double-barrelled shot guns at three paces!

WALTER—My dear sir, I have never heard of Miss Alden before and won't permit my eyes to desecrate the person who deigns to consecrate my fancies with her muscular evolutions and convolutions.

BLAKE—There's a handsome apology, my boy. (*Patterson is mollified*) And it does you both credit. (*To Walter*) Only I just dare you to look away. Woman kaleidoscope—every shake another rapture! If you don't succumb —

HELEN (*Half aside to Blake*)—This then was your motive?

PATTERSON—Is this your new device?

BLAKE (*Testily*)—Vanity of vanities! Of course. Can an architect turned composer resist the artiste who interprets his symphony? Bah! No charge to you, Patterson.

WALTER—It seems to be at my expense.

BLAKE—You see, this fantastic literary youth has a theory that real love isn't between a person and a person, but on the upper levels between the superperson of the one and the superperson of the other—by wireless—and the persons get along superbly on the ground when the spiritual doubles up aloft rock rainbows for hobby horses in time.

WALTER (*To Patterson*)—I congratulate you; there's truth in your theory.

HELEN (*Provoked*)—Moonshine!

MCARTHUR—We're on the earth.

EDITH—In the present tense.

PATTERSON—Anyway, it's my moonshine.

WALTER—Reflected from what sun?

PATTERSON—That's my secret.

MCARTHUR—A private luminary?

BLAKE (*Laughing*)—An open secret! You see I told you—two of a kind—one lunatic understands and hates another. If Pat's theory, in the abstract, takes Walter by the hair of his head, what'll Pat's queen of the sylphs do in the concrete? (*Half aside to Walter*) And then you see, Walter, she's mine by reversion. (*To Helen, unperturbed*) I'll propose again!

HELEN—Don't, because I'd have to refuse.

BLAKE—For the twentieth time? Then the twenty-first will be lucky.

WALTER (*Bitterly*)—As lucky as the previous score.

HELEN—You're not flattering.

WALTER—Why should I feign and fawn and sidle? Am I at the court of Louis Quatorze? The only real person is the substantial, the tangible? Well, I'm afraid of all such persons. We're in the present tense? Well, it bores me. We don't love ahead of where we stand—in the remote—the possible—the ideal? And here, here where we stand, we are to love—what, pray?

BLAKE—A truce! Let's resume the merry war after I give the signal.

SCENE 9

(As soon as the music strikes up, Walter looks between his knees in sombre mood. Appearance of dancer, invisible to audience, announced by ocular interest and pleasure of faces. By degrees the pleasure becomes rapt—Helen childishly delighted almost to mimicry of the dance. Blake alone remains detached, watching his little group and the dancer by rapid shifts, evidently egotistically moved with pride at being financial backer and producer of the incantation. He constantly glowers at Walter, shaking his head in remonstrance.)

MCARTHUR *(Unconsciously breaks in)*—Beautiful! Beautiful!
(Walter looks up—then, curious and contemptuous, watches—then becomes interested—leans forward fascinated.)

BLAKE—Good! Good! *(Grunts approbation of Walter.)*
(Walter recognizes Laura—Horror and further fascination—Attempts to rise—Controls his violent agitation. Blake nudges Helen. She observes uneasily—her pleasure evidently ceases. Blake's satisfaction broader than ever—rubs his hands and bubbles with malicious glee.)

PATTERSON *(As the music ceases)*—Olympian! Orphic! *(No one heeds him.)*

MCARTHUR—Music of the gods!

BLAKE—Interpreted by a goddess, Walter.

PATTERSON—I congratulate myself on having recognized genius in its germinant stage.

WALTER (*Rises to his feet, dazed*)—Madman! Fool!

PATTERSON—You mean me?

WALTER—You? No.

PATTERSON—I am so relieved. Wasn't she a seraphic enchantment? (*Exit.*)

HELEN (*To Walter*)—Who is this Adeline Alden?

BLAKE—A witch. A midocean moonrise. A kaleidoscope. An aurora borealis. A tropic star shower. (*Exeunt Edith and McArthur strolling to right.*)

HELEN (*To Walter*)—A newly discovered affinity?

WALTER (*Sarcastically*)—With me, an unsuccessful rôle of yours.

HELEN—You insinuate ——?

WALTER—Nothing at all.

HELEN—You have met her before?

WALTER—A stranger till even now, although when I composed that movement of joy, I must have divined her.

BLAKE—Didn't I tell you an artist is a born lunatic? He loves best, you see, what he gets out of his inner consciousness. Fatal recognitions apt to occur at any moment.

HELEN—You seem to get a deal of brutal gladness out of it, sir.

BLAKE—Why shouldn't I? Discomfiture of the romantic, of artists' hallucinations. See-Saw, Marjory Daw! Bopeep has lost her sheep. You know a woman, and then you don't—you don't and then you do!

HELEN (*The suspicion dawning—to Blake*) What do you know, sir?

BLAKE—Only that Patterson came to me for the hard cash to start this celestial nymph making the country crazy, and I agreed, provided she'd perform on the coast for my friends first to the especial music of our anonymous genius.

WALTER (*Turns to Blake*)—You knew then who she is?

BLAKE—Haven't the least idea now!

BEYOND DISILLUSION

HELEN (*The new light suddenly dawning at Walter's query to Blake*)—Is that woman your wife?

WALTER—No! I have no wife!

HELEN—But she was?

WALTER—Not she. Never! And by what right, pray, do you subject me to your interrogatory?

HELEN—That given me by your protestations.

WALTER—Gratitude, Madam. I protest —

HELEN—And I want the truth.

WALTER (*Starts to withdraw*)—If you press me, you shall have it.

HELEN—Walter, don't equivocate. I can't endure the suspense.

WALTER (*Turns on her with a strange anger at himself which seems rage at her and has moments of lucid perception of the crossed wires*)—Because in a dark hour you offered your good fellowship, and I accepted—you encouraged me and distracted me as a clever kind woman only can, does that give you a title deed to my soul?

BLAKE—I tell you it's his own music, not the witch, body-snatched him! It wouldn't have been the same to any other music. Confess!

WALTER (*Almost barks at Blake*)—No, you fool!

BLAKE (*Laughs*)—Thanks, lunatic! Didn't I say so? Vanity of vanities!

HELEN (*To Walter*)—I want to hear in plain speech what you know of this woman.

WALTER—Nothing! The more is the pity! When my spirit was broken, my life adrift, you persuaded me to return to my boyhood love—to Music. Architecture then ceased being a religion, and fell to the rank of a lucrative trade. Blake, like a good fellow, helped me get on my own feet. Does all this give him and you, I repeat, a mortgage on my immortal soul? I mistakenly broke sacred ties for freedom; do you think that to enter into a worse bondage I should desecrate—open to the vulgar gaze—my inmost being?

BLAKE—That's fine. According to programme. Do it handsomely, man. Don't forget she's paid you the signal compliment—she's never paid me—jealousy!

HELEN—Old idiot!

BLAKE—But then, you don't get such little love words shot at you. Keep your temper, sweet. If you are vexed at yourself, that's what all people of sense are. Not vexed at you—of course they don't trouble themselves about you—but each at his own damned fool self. Oh, you're not peculiar. So don't you turn the fire hose of your rage on us, who are not burning just now! And you, Miss Darneill, stop poking your parasol into the crater of a live volcano to stir it up.

(Helen contemptuously ignores him.) (Walter turns to go.)

HELEN—Walter, stop.

BLAKE—You needn't insult me—you're mine by reversion—on the rebound, you know.

HELEN—Walter, for the last time, answer just one question: Was that woman your wife?

WALTER *(Bitterly)*—Would I have left her?

HELEN—You evade me.

WALTER—How about wearying of a single note? Does that argue polygamy? Or the need rather of a various individual?

BLAKE—Right you are. A vaudeville show.

WALTER—What about response to fresh elements—caused by what, once old, has become new? Besides, does one love, madam, by a book of tactics: shoulder arms, carry arms, ground arms? *(Exit brusquely as McArthur and Edith re-enter.)*

HELEN *(To McArthur)*—He is mad. Mr. Walter refuses to answer whether he ever knew before this dancer.

MCARTHUR—Perhaps my friend Walter is mad, as you say. But that woman, who danced, none of us ever really knew before.

EDITH—I predicted her.

MCARTHUR—But never had the definite prevision——

EDITH—Neither had you ——

McARTHUR—How about direct vision?

(Edith is perturbed. Looks steadily at him—and then withdraws rapidly with a reproachful ——)

EDITH—Arthur!

McARTHUR *(Calling her)*—Edith! *(Follows her.)*

BLAKE—Their turn now. Smitten by the queen of the sirens.
(Chuckles.)

HELEN *(Turns on Blake)*—All this you prepared on purpose?

BLAKE *(Laughing good-naturedly)*—The charge falls to the ground of its dead weight! Had I known Miss —— to be Walter's ex-wife, would I have presumed there could be the desired danger for him in the spectacle of her dance? But you have had your demonstration cheap. So hurry up your twentieth refusal, so that I can make my twenty-first and final proposal. The house is yours and all the appurtenances thereof—as Walter would say.

(Helen looks at Blake first angrily, then soberly, then curiously.)

HELEN—You schemed all this for me?

BLAKE—Pshaw! Child's play!

HELEN—And suppose I disappoint you?

BLAKE *(Drolly)*—You couldn't in the usual way.

HELEN—Well, by accepting you then.

BLAKE *(Nearly collapsed)*—Helen!

HELEN—No heart failures yet—till you've heard the conditions.
Walter must build the house. How'll you manage that?

BLAKE—Easy. Put him under new obligations. *(Is overjoyed)*
Detain the Prima Donna and her poet-beau. They are invited for the night. Automobile conveniently out of order. Ha! I'll find a way! After all. ——To think of it! After all! Ha! Ha!

BEYOND DISILLUSION

SCENE 10

(Enter Laura (Adeline Alden) led by Patterson. Blake starts to follow Walter. Stops.)

BLAKE—Ha! Congratulations, Miss Alden! The Muse Terpsichorë is jealous. What an artist would call an “inspiration.”

LAURA—The music is responsible. It set my soul free, and I owe my acquaintance with it to you, sir. Who is the composer?

BLAKE—A threefold mystery—Jones, Smith, Brown in one. *(Exit laughing.)*

MCARTHUR—You are mistress of a noble art.

LAURA—I thank you. What! It's you, Arthur! And you, Edith, too! *(Embraces her)* I am not ashamed to meet you again now.

EDITH—You were very cruel to keep away from us so long.

LAURA—I feared to lose my courage. And this lady for whose delectation I was engaged to dance?

HELEN—You would hardly remember Helen Darneill?

LAURA—Unfortunately, I have not been allowed to forget her.

HELEN—You couldn't reveal professional secrets to me then? I was no innocent. Esoteric mysteries you shared with the artist alone!

LAURA—Miss Darneill, let us not be bitter. I at least owe you thanks. You opened the door of my prison house.

HELEN—Ha! Ha! And I'll furnish you with ground plan, elevations and incidental cross sections of the warden that was. If he claims you by reversion, though we've improved him greatly, out here (you can believe me, who had the main part of the undertaking), you will owe me for teaching the bear late in life how to dance to a woman's whistling. *(To Blake, returning with Walter)* Ha! You've brought the artist at last! *(Turning to Walter)* who'll build for me that house for a free spirit—for the woman I'm going to be, *(Turning to Blake)* thanks to my lord and master.

WALTER—Pardon me—no; but for Blake's sake—I forgot, I must first congratulate you.

HELEN (*To Laura*)—You see, not for my sake—he has learned better—poor devil!

LAURA—And does his teacher the honor due! (*She turns away.*)

HELEN—Well, and what will you build for me—for Blake's sake?

WALTER—A Petit Trianon, a Moorish Mosque—any sort of bridal cake you want served on his gold plate.

HELEN—Ha! Ha! You see, Miss Avery, my mocking bird is ready to pipe any tune now. So grateful to see the blackbird on his perch to be, in the golden cage!

BLAKE—Blackbird! First dividend! Eh? Bridal cake. O my dear Miss Alden, don't depart in high dudgeon because the empress makes merry. As for the automobile—it's broken down.

LAURA—Mr. Patterson will telephone to the city. (*Exit Patterson.*)

BLAKE—Wireless of his own instantaneous installing——

LAURA—But you promised me——

BLAKE—Automobiles and telephones are a law unto themselves. Hours of repair work, I assure you.

LAURA—I will wait.

BLAKE—You would better be my guests for the night.

HELEN—Having done myself the distinguished honor to accept Mr. Blake's offer of hand and heart ——

BLAKE—And Alhambra.

HELEN—May I anticipate my delight as your hostess to be?

WALTER (*To Laura*)—I must see you.

LAURA—Have you not already seen me?

WALTER—For that very reason you cannot surely refuse me an interview.

LAURA—Have you plotted this unsportsmanlike manœuvre?

BLAKE (*Retiring with Helen*)—'Tisn't he, poor devil (*laughing*) who limed the twigs.

WALTER—Little did I dream that the famous dancer was the woman whose art impulse I thoughtlessly sacrificed.

SCENE 11

(*Helen, at Blake's dumbshow speech, withdraws within.*)

WALTER—Yes, blind that I was, I have seen you at last!

LAURA—And what am I, but a patient copyist of the old Greek vases?—reviver, after long brooding, of bygone emotions?—One who abandons the body to be possessed of the god.

WALTER—Whom you invoke by the incantation of a few bars!

LAURA—Whom you have also denied!

WALTER—Let a repentant fellow-worshipper wish you joy—great joy of your victorious quest. (*Offers his hand.*)

LAURA—I thank you from my heart.

WALTER—And I—God knows—Words fail me!

LAURA—Better so!

WALTER—You cannot understand what drafts of bliss I have drunk to-night.

LAURA—Of the fountain of youth?

WALTER—I am not merely captivated, enraptured, I am forever yours.

LAURA—Alas! Comrade of old days!

WALTER—And of days to come!

LAURA—Never! I warred against your art—thank heaven I was defeated—but I can never forgive you.

WALTER (*Smiling*)—That I forsook my ideals?

LAURA—For success!

WALTER (*Smiling*)—At another woman's bidding than yours?

LAURA—Not that you fell—for I owe all to that.

WALTER—That I was tempted?

LAURA—Yes, Richard. I can never forgive you that.

WALTER—Beware, Laura, beloved, lest you misjudge me now—by appearances.

LAURA—I cannot judge you. I can only see what you have done. Denied your ideals!

WALTER—Those I once cherished? But what of the half gods going—that the greater gods may come? What if loyalty to the new, elder than the old, involved disloyalty to the outworn?

LAURA—Do you think you will deceive me as easily as yourself? You that were flint-hearted for the truth's sake—have been melting wax in a worldly siren's smile! God—that you could barter away your soul just as I was winning mine!

SCENE 12

(Enter Patterson.)

PATTERSON—I gather you were formerly Miss Alden's husband?

WALTER—From her description?

PATTERSON—That of a man who could have failed her—would hardly have interested me.

WALTER—But one whom perchance she still loved?

LAURA—Richard!

PATTERSON—Don't answer him. The woman whom I know, you never saw.

WALTER—True! But are you certain you do not now deceive yourself as I did once? Besides, do you know a girl who danced on a rock over a sheer abyss among blooming laurel to the fiddle of a moonstruck boy?

LAURA—Would to God you were he again!

PATTERSON—I love the woman, who involves and includes her past. Whatever thereof was alive, lives in her. At least I never deserted her. I will escort her to the city. Blake and you have

conspired in vain to keep her your prisoner over night. She shall be protected by me, sir, from distressing memories.

WALTER (*Ironically*)—Which are not Her SELF?

PATTERSON—I claim to be the first man who has really conceived the divine passion—which scares back into the night all spectres of right and wrong.

WALTER—Fortunate youth, despiser of the past. Her past—is to-day yours?—And to-morrow?

PATTERSON—Love has exalted me beyond time and space.

WALTER—Initiated you into the Fourth Dimension!

PATTERSON—At least given me the gift of the seership hitherto unsuspected. You, the haunting threat, the past, to bestride her path—I confronted you for her, before I knew you! Picture lover to some purpose.

WALTER—You have exploited the situation, O poet. I accept your appeal—if you have read truly—if you have foreseen her use of the divine word ——

PATTERSON (*Reads with increasing tremor of enthusiasm*)—

“Oh, lover, if thou love my soul
Deeper than twilight dream,
How can'st thou more than pity dole
To her—woe's me—I seem?

“If to thine eye my spirit glow,
Beyond the glimmer of dawn,
Should not thy heart the bliss foreknow
Of love—through love—foregone?

“Never, oh, never, may I Thee
Love, lover mine; for thou
To her I am dost bend the knee,
To her I disavow.

“Could She I am not, whom I yearn
With all my being to be,—
Meet Thee that shall be—should I turn
Thus solitary from thee?

“If plighted were They twain—and wed
Beyond the death of us,—
Then might even we know love—tho’ dead,
A love not blasphemous.”

WALTER—I bear you witness—truly an inspired poem. I approve every line of it, and yet I claim you, Laura.

LAURA (*Reaching for the poem*)—Your verses, Poet! What I have felt, they express. Richard, they are my answer to you.

WALTER—And shall this vain stripling witness my shame—ours rather—we lovers once—betrothed—married—father and mother of the selfsame children? Will you marry this clever juggler?

LAURA—No. I quote his lines against himself also. (*Patterson is dumbfounded. His hurt vanity and astonishment wilt him.*)

PATTERSON—Me? You reject me? For one who was deaf long years and blind? Who mistreated you? Ungrateful! Mad-woman!

LAURA (*Pityingly*)—What do you know, my dear boy, of man and wife? You have seen—not felt; you have written, not lived! Has he sinned? So have I. You, sinless, can only judge. Leave me to protect myself against Mr. Walter—as I have protected myself against you.

PATTERSON—My best revenge is to obey you—I leave the field to you, sir—but only for the moment. (*Looks at Walter with an almost comical fury—exit.*)

LAURA—To return misogynist, with a satire in his pocket—Poor silly boy.

SCENE 13

WALTER—You need weapons against me? What harm could I now do, having beheld your very Self?

LAURA—None—because I still behold what once you were.

WALTER—An Ideal—place it back or forward—is an infidelity to any man. Flesh and blood cannot realize our dreams. But in us are many persons. You remember, I once told you, we want progress for jaded senses; Change—the unforeseen aspect of the manifold for our curiosity—but loyalty also for our inmost spirit's sake? Self identical, we demand our ideal's self identity! You are she for me with whom no ideal would compete. It would fade to the pale ghost of one vain mood's projection.

LAURA—It is too late. Charge me with untruth if you dare—I love ——

WALTER—What man?

LAURA—None you know ——

WALTER—Whom you have met?

LAURA—Never, though I know him.

WALTER—Delusion!

LAURA—He freed me. I was, when I felt his magical touch, delivered forever from bondage—No obsession dominated my will. But—it was he who unlocked the creative depths in me for the first time; caught up and transfused the painfully acquired technique with a compelling inspiration.

WALTER—And who, pray, did this? I have a right to know.

LAURA—He spoke what was in me to express.

WALTER—A teacher?

LAURA—Ay! And more. He was as God to me.

WALTER—His name?

LAURA—I dared not inquire. Dionysus sufficed for the spirit's worship.

WALTER (*Greatly agitated*)—Don't tantalize a desperate man. I gave you up for art. Then art deserted me, and I hated her!

Helen put me, without realizing it, under heavy obligations. She cheered me—urged me to use my skill on lower planes and to save my soul, if such I had, in religion, in poetry, in music! The force of her assiduous pursuit amused, flattered, touched the senses, all the more that she made no demands of the spirit. I found a holy secret place whither my true self retreated. And your dance to-night proved to me that I am freer than ever I was. Who is this anonymous wonder-worker? A clue to him, that I may challenge him—outbid him, spiritually—become the only man for you, as you are the only woman for me.

LAURA—I could almost wish it were possible. Have we not suffered at each other's hands? Have we not common memories? Foolish lovers once ——

WALTER—And never again? Wiser? Saner? More worshipful?

LAURA—I fear not. I am as one plighted—nay, wed already; and though he knows it not, when I danced to-night we were made sacramentally one.

WALTER—To-night? (*A sudden insight*) The man whose music you danced?

LAURA—Oh, Richard! (*Walter drops on his knees to Laura.*)

WALTER—Forgive me, that I made the music for her I longed to know—challenging God's omnipotence to create her for me in some future world—and here you are—SHE!

LAURA (*All but faint for joy*)—You! You! The music yours?

WALTER—Thank heaven! See, dearest, Belted Orion hath unsheathed his sword! Loyal henceforth I swear to be, though we realize not in this life or ever—that vision. Loyal to my vision of you.

LAURA—And you, then, have loved me “Deeper than twilight dream”?

WALTER—“Beyond the glimmer of dawn.”

LAURA—Adoration for what is to be?

WALTER—And passionate, tender kindness to what in part exists.

LAURA—Joy and awe, under the fading stars.

WALTER—Replighted, darling, in this our first marriage, wide awake—as two immortal beings.

LAURA—Oh, God, the shame!

WALTER—Mine. Altogether.

LAURA—No—that it should have needed in our case—a miracle——

WALTER—To create the condition of a divine love?

LAURA—But others shall need no miracle! Some day, all shall understand.

WALTER—The mystery of self within self? Depths below depths? Sphere above sphere?

LAURA—And the children of our “sleep-walking” marriage.

WALTER—We shall give them the new birth into the kingdom of love.

(The moon sets in the Golden Gate and the stars brighten, as the lovers look in perfect silence. A mist creeps along the ground between the trees—gradually rising, veils them—The curtain slowly falls.)



AFTERWORD

Via Cordis Via Crucis

I. YOUTH'S AUGURIES

Only-belovèd, O these golden days:—

Now—yearnings vague, divine disquietude,
elusive, visionary, many-hued
hopes, that forevermore the heart essays,
up dim meandering enchanted ways,
to overtake; Now—palpitant solitude,
where youth her spirit shy would fain seclude
in doubt, hushed rapture, tremour and amaze.

Yet, Each foreknew (though fancy-free, heart-whole)
how friend must pass and sweetest comrade fail,
imagination fade and passion thwart,
and th' freedom nowise of our quest avail—
save they conjoin, should man and maid consort
(dear fellow-farers) to one common goal!

II. OBSESSION

But who, (sweethearts in wayward discontent,
in hunger mystical and thirst) would dare
on such all-hallowed pilgrimage to fare,—
and dread not, after, in anguish to repent
the passionate urgency irreverent
that wooed Her with his need her wealth to share,
dream to forego, adventure to forbear—
destined, if on her lonely ways she went?

Yea, (if even for all her womanhood sweet and strong,
her answer pure to love's most holy wants,
fortitude, divination, and swift response
heart-sensitive to heavenly presences)
some day Thou cry not:—"Clear, too clear it is
ne'er can my ultimate self to Thee belong."

AFTERWORD

III. THE GORDIAN KNOT

Ah, Truth shall in such consecrated Twain
unveil her glowing shame and piteous sore
for loves' sake, so th' inviolate Troth they swore
have naught to fear; and yet, shall they refrain
from pity that belittleth and disdain;
rather, with mutual Reverence heal, restore—
creating divine beauty to adore,—
till th' innocency of Eden both regain.

Who shall in the petty round his heart assure
of staid forbearance, homely faithfulness,—
yet also, at need, irradiant surprise?
achieve a valiant self-hood,—yet no less
(foregoing glorious whim, fantastic lure)
all rebel selves, in secret, sacrifice?

IV. THE SWORD STROKE

What shall to th' spirit its extreme blisses grant
as,—ever, th' quickening pulse and thrill of growth:
to reach, expansive, wresting from the loth
stark elements their nurture ministrant
for toppling bloom and fruit? or, calm, to plant
the mail'd heel archangelic on behemoth
and spewing leviathan? or, heavenly-wroth,
like solar photosphere leap, blaze and pant?

But marsh-fog stole, ere from youth's dream we woke,
environing us with th' morbid, dismal, void.
Dull, ineffective, craven paralysis!
Who would not rather, for bygone hope enjoyed,
leap into th' ice-fang'd horror of the abyss,—
than blinded grope, cringe, stifle, whine and choke?

AFTERWORD

V. SELF EVOCATION

Whose deity invoke but Love's, by whom
to summon from vasty legions uncreate
even *now* that Self:—an Arm to reinstate,
sword-brandishing, my soul, risen from the tomb
disherited, on her throne? Or, the storm-gloom
riven through, a Star with unquenchable life elate
singing God's firmament above man's fate:
for myriad conquering spirits—infinite room?
Or, from beetling cloud-refulgent peak of ice
in th' dazzle of sky, to draw the crystal thread
by lightning loop and hither-thither rash
from level to level, (leaving lakes that flash
sky-lucent), till, behold, the waste lands dead
brood, green, and bloom—an earthly Paradise?

VI. LOVE'S THAUMATURGY

Then Love, O Love, we hail thee, (even we!)
who spakest again the fiat else unheard—
and Light was, ay, and Right; and undeterred
the feeble stood, nor bent to Baal the knee!
Who didst, when Spring lavished her all, decree
flower-wreaths, that Summer and Autumn crown and gird
their children for far journeying, long deferred,
to violet skylines over land and sea.

Who, when the famine fell upon us sore,
feddest with faith from thine unfailing store,
didst pour royal anointing from thy cruse,
ay, sweet repose miraculous, and delight;
and the barren spumy sea of death—suffuse
with after-glows that earth and heaven unite!

AFTERWORD

VII. LOVE'S THEURGY

Yet, Love, thy greater wonders who may laud?

When th' earth a lurid shell roll'd, fire-crevass'd?

When into the hoar gloaming stretch'd man's past
his futile aeons of ruin? When, deep-awed,

th' heav'ns spread for us their chemic glory abroad
from infinitude to infinitude, till the Vast

gulfed into nothingness, and the soul aghast
sickened beholding th' macrocosmic fraud?

Ah, then it was his miracle Love wrought:—

for Thou and I drew nigher, and nigher; when lo

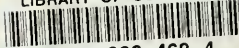
of Thee and Me, withdrawn to springs of light,
there blazed the ALL out of the nethermost naught,

till They we are, unto God's fullness glow,—

and one love, brimming, mount from height to height!



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